SOME DIVERSIONS OF A MAN OF LETTERS

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OTHER WORKS BY

MR. EDMUND GOSSE

Northern Studies. 1879.
Life of Gray. 1882.
Seventeenth-Century Studies. 1883.
Life of Congreve. 1888.
A History of Eighteenth-Century Literature. 1899.
Life of Philip Henry Gosse, F.R.S. 1890.
Gossip in a Library. 1891.
The Secret of Narcisse: a Romance. 1892.
Questions at Issue. 1893.
Critical Kit-Kats. 1896.
A Short History of Modern English Literature. 1897.
Life and Letters of John Donne. 1899.
Hypolympia. 1901.
Life of Jeremy Taylor. 1904.
French Profiles. 1904.
Life of Sir Thomas Browne. 1905.
Father and Son. 1907.
Life of Ibsen. 1908.
Two Visits to Denmark. 1911.
Collected Poems. 1911.
Portraits and Sketches. 1912.
Inter Arma. 1916.
Three French Moralists. 1918.

SOME DIVERSIONS OF A MAN OF LETTERS

BY

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TO

EVAN CHARTERIS

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ON FLUCTUATIONS OF TASTE

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When Voltaire sat down to write a book on Epic Poetry, he dedicated his first chapter to "Differences of Taste in Nations." A critic of to-day might well find it necessary, on the threshold of a general inquiry, to expatiate on "Differences of Taste in Generations." Changes of standard in the arts are always taking place, but it is only with advancing years, perhaps, that we begin to be embarrassed by the recurrence of them. In early youth we fight for the new forms of art, for the new æsthetic shibboleths, and in that happy ardour of battle we have no time or inclination to regret the demigods whom we dispossess. But the years glide on, and, behold! one morning, we wake up to find our own predilections treated with contempt, and the objects of our own idolatry consigned to the waste-paper basket. Then the matter becomes serious, and we must either go on struggling for a cause inevitably lost, or we must give up the whole matter in indifference. This week I read, over the signature of a very clever and very popular literary character of our day, the remark that Wordsworth's was "a genteel mind of the third rank." I put down the newspaper in which this airy dictum was printed, and, for the first time, I was glad that poor Mr. Matthew Arnold was no longer with us. But, of course, the evolutions of taste must go on, whether they hurt the living and the dead, or no.

Is there, then, no such thing as a permanent element of poetic beauty? The curious fact is that leading critics in each successive generation are united in believing that there is, and that the reigning favourite conforms to it. The life of a reputation is like the life of a plant, and seems, in these days, to be like the life of an annual. We watch the seed, admiration for Wordsworth, planted about 1795, shoot obscurely from the ground, and gradually clothe itself with leaves till about 1840; then it bursts into blossom of rapturous praise, and about 1870 is hung with clusters of the fruit of "permanent" appreciation. In 1919, little more than a century from its first evolution in obscurity, it recedes again in the raggedness of obloquy, and cumbers the earth, as dim old "genteel" Wordsworth, whom we are assured that nobody reads. But why were "the best judges" scornful in 1800 and again in 1919 of what gave the noblest and the most inspiriting pleasure to "the best judges" in 1870? The execution of the verse has not altered, the conditions of imagination seem the same, why then is the estimate always changing? Is every form of poetic taste, is all trained enjoyment of poetry, merely a graduated illusion which goes up and down like a wave of the sea and carries "the best judges" with it? If not, who is right, and who is wrong, and what is the use of dogmatising? Let us unite to quit all vain ambition, and prefer the jangle of the music-halls, with its direct "æsthetic thrill."

So far as I know, the only philosopher who has dared to face this problem is Mr. Balfour, in the brilliant second chapter of his "Foundations of Belief." He has there asked, "Is there any fixed and permanent element in beauty?" The result of his inquiry is disconcerting; after much discussion he decides that there is not. Mr. Balfour deals, in particular, with only two forms of art, Music and Dress, but he tacitly includes the others with

them. It is certain that the result of his investigations is the singularly stultifying one that we are not permitted to expect "permanent relations" in or behind the feeling of poetic beauty, which may be indifferently awakened by Blake to-day and by Hayley to-morrow. If the critic says that the verse of Blake is beautiful and that of Hayley is not, he merely "expounds case-made law." The result seems to be that no canons of taste exist; that what are called "laws" of style are enacted only for those who make them, and for those whom the makers can bully into accepting their legislation, a new generation of law-breakers being perfectly free to repeal the code. Southey yesterday and Keats to-day; why not Southey again to-morrow, or perhaps Tupper? Such is the cynical *cul-de-sac* into which the logic of a philosopher drives us.

We have had in France an example of *volte-face* in taste which I confess has left me gasping. I imagine that if Mr. Balfour was able to spare a moment from the consideration of fiscal reform, he must have spent it in triumphing over the fate of M. Sully-Prudhomme. In the month of September 1906 this poet closed, after a protracted agony, "that long disease, his life." He had compelled respect by his courage in the face of hopeless pain, and, one might suppose, some gratitude by the abundance of his benefactions. His career was more than blameless, it was singularly exemplary. Half-blind, half-paralysed, for a long time very poor, pious without fanaticism, patient, laborious, devoted to his friends, he seems to have been one of those extraordinary beings whose fortitude in the face of affliction knows no abatement. It would be ridiculous to quote any of these virtues as a reason for admiring the poetry of Sully-Prudhomme. I mention them merely to show that there was nothing in his personal temperament to arouse hatred or in his

personal conditions to excuse envy. Nothing to account for the, doubtless, entirely sincere detestation which his poetry seemed to awaken in all "the best minds" directly he was dead.

As every one knows, from about 1870 to 1890, Sully-Prudhomme was, without a rival, the favourite living poet of the French. Victor Hugo was there, of course, until 1885—and posthumously until much later—but he was a god, and the object of idolatry. All who loved human poetry, the poetry of sweetness and light, took Sully-Prudhomme to their heart of hearts. The *Stances et Poèmes* of 1865 had perhaps the warmest welcome that ever the work of a new poet had in France. Théophile Gautier instantly pounced upon *Le Vase Brisé* (since too-famous) and introduced it to a thousand school-girls. Sainte-Beuve, though grown old and languid, waked up to celebrate the psychology and the music of this new poetry, so delicate, fresh and transparent. An unknown beauty of extreme refinement seemed to have been created in it, a beauty made up of lucidity, pathos and sobriety. Readers who are now approaching seventy will not forget with what emotion they listened, for instance, to that dialogue between the long-dead father and the newly-buried son, which closes:—

"J' ai laissé ma sœur et ma mère
Et les beaux livres que j' ai lus;
Vous n'avez pas de bru, mon père;
On m'a blessé, je n'aime plus."

"De tes aïeux compte le nombre,
Va baiser leurs fronts inconnus,
Et viens faire ton lit dans l'ombre
A côté des derniers venus.

"Ne pleure pas, dors dans l'argile
En espérant le grand reveil."
"O père, qu'il est difficile
De ne plus penser au soleil!"

This body of verse, to which was presently added fresh collections—*Les Epreuves* (1886), *Les Vaines Tendresses* (1875), *Le Prisme* (1886),—was welcomed by the elder Sanhedrim, and still more vociferously and unanimously by the younger priesthood of criticism. It pleased the superfine amateurs of poetry, it was accepted with enthusiasm by the thousands who enjoy without analysing their enjoyment. In 1880, to have questioned that Sully-Prudhomme was a very noble poet would have been like challenging Tennyson in 1870, or Cowley in 1660. Jules Lemaître claimed that he was the greatest artist in symbols that France had ever produced. Brunetière, so seldom moved by modern literature, celebrated with ardour the author of *Les Vaines Tendresses* as having succeeded better than any other writer who had ever lived in translating into perfect language the dawn and the twilight of emotion. That Gaston Paris and M. Anatole France competed in lofty praise of the lyrics of Sully-Prudhomme, is perhaps less remarkable than that Paul Verlaine, whom all the younger schools still look upon as their apostle and guide, declared, in reviewing *Les Ecuries d'Augias*, that the force of style of Sully-Prudhomme was excelled only by the beauty of his detail. It is needless to multiply examples of the unanimous praise given by the divers schools of criticism to Sully-Prudhomme up to about 1890. His was, perhaps, the least contested literary glory of France.

His death startlingly reminded us that this state of things had to be entirely reversed. It is true that the peculiar talent of Sully-Prudhomme, being almost exclusively lyrical, scarcely survived his youth, and that he cumbered his moon of sands with two huge and clumsy wrecks, *La Justice* (1878) and *Le Bonheur* (1888), round which the feet of the fairies could hardly be expected to trip. One must be an academician and hopelessly famous

before one dares to inflict two elephantine didactic epics on one's admirers. Unfortunately, too, the poet undertook to teach the art of verse in his *Réflexions* (1892), and his *Testament Poétique* (1901), brochures which greatly irritated the young. It is probably wise for academicians, whether poets or the reverse, to sit beside their nectar, and not to hurl bolts down into the valley. But, behind these errors of judgment, there they remain—those early volumes, which seemed to us all so full of exquisite little masterpieces. Why is it that nobody, except a few elderly persons, any longer delights in them? The notices which Sully-Prudhomme's death awakened in the Paris Press were either stamped with the mark of old contemporary affection, or else, when they were not abusive, were as frigid as the tomb itself. "Ses tendresses sucrées, sirupeuses, sont vaines en effet," said a critic of importance! Indeed, it would appear so; and where are the laurels of yester-year?

To those who were young when Sully-Prudhomme entered into his immortality it seems impossible to realise that the glory has already departed. Gaston Paris celebrated "the penetrating sincerity and the exquisite expression of feeling" which distinguished Sully-Prudhomme above all other poets. He was the bard of the inner life, sincere and dignified, full of melancholy reverie. A great critic compared *La Voie Lactée* and *Les Stalactites* with the far-off sound of bells heard down some lovely valley in a golden afternoon. Yet the images and the language were precise; Sully-Prudhomme was a mathematician, and if he was reproached with anything like a fault, it was that his style was slightly geometrical. It would be otiose to collect any more tributes to his genius, as it appeared to all Frenchmen, cultivated or semi-cultivated, about the year 1880. With an analysis of Sully-Prudhomme's poetry I am not here concerned, but with the question of why

it is that such an authority as Rémy de Gourmont could, in 1907, without awakening any protest among persons under fifty say that it was a "sort of social crime" to impose such balderdash as the verse of Sully-Prudhomme on the public.

It is not needful to quote other living critics, who may think such prolongation of their severities ungraceful. But a single contrast will suffice. When, in 1881, Sully-Prudhomme was elected to the French Academy, expert opinion throughout the Press was unanimous in admitting that this was an honour deservedly given to the best lyric poet of the age. In 1906, when a literary journal sent out this question, "Who is the poet you love best?" and was answered by more than two hundred writers of verse, the diversity of opinion was indeed excessive; such poets as Sainte-Beuve, as Brizeux, as Rodenbach, received votes, all the great masters received many. But Sully-Prudhomme, alone, received not one vote. A new generation had arisen, and one of its leaders, with cruel wit, transferred to the reputation of the author his own most famous line:—"N'y touchez pas, il est brisé."

It is necessary to recollect that we are not dealing with the phenomenon of the inability of very astute literary people to recognise at once a startling new sort of beauty. When Robert Browning lent the best poems of Keats to Mrs. Carlyle, she read them and returned them with the remark that "almost any young gentleman with a sweet tooth might be expected to write such things." Mrs. Carlyle was a very clever woman, but she was not quite "educated up to" Keats. The history of letters is full of these grotesque limitations of taste, in the presence of great art which has not yet been "classed." But we are here considering the much stranger and indeed extremely disconcerting case of a product which has been accepted, with acclamation, by the judges of one generation, and is

contemptuously hooted out of court by the next. It is not, on this occasion, Sully-Prudhomme whom we are considering, but his critics. If Théophile Gautier was right in 1867, Rémy de Gourmont must have been wrong in 1907; yet they both were honourable men in the world of criticism. Nor is it merely the *dictum* of a single man, which, however ingenious, may be paradoxical. It is worse than that; it is the fact that one whole generation seems to have agreed with Gautier, and that another whole generation is of the same mind as Rémy de Gourmont.

Then it is that Mr. Balfour, like Galuppi with his "cold music," comes in and tells us that this is precisely what we have to expect. All beauty consists in the possession of certain relations, which being withdrawn, beauty disappears from the object that seemed to possess it. There is no permanent element in poetic excellence. We are not to demand any settled opinion about poetry. So Mr. Balfour seems to creak it, and we want the heart to scold. But is it quite so certain that there is no fixed norm of beauty imaginable? Is it the fact that poetic pleasure cannot "be supposed to last any longer than the transient reaction between it" and the temporary prejudice of our senses? If this be true, then are critics of all men most miserable.

Yet, deeply dejected as it leaves me to know that very clever people despise the "genteel third-rate mind" of Wordsworth, I am not quite certain that I yield to Mr. Balfour's brilliant and paralysing logic. That eminent philosopher seems to say "you find the poets, whom you revered in your youth, treated with contempt in your old age. Well! It is very sad, and perhaps it would annoy me too, if I were not a philosopher. But it only shows how right I was to tell you not to expect permanent relations behind the feeling of beauty, since all is illusion,

and there is no such thing as a principle of taste, but only a variation of fashion."

Is it, however, quite so certain, after all, that there is no standard? It must be admitted that there seems to be no fixed rule of taste, not even a uniformity of practice or general tendency to agreement in particular cases. But the whole study of the fine arts would lead to despair if we allowed ourselves to accept this admission as implying that no conceivable principle of taste exists. We may not be able to produce it, like a yard-measure, and submit works of imagination to it, once and for all, in the eyes of a consternated public. But when we observe, as we must allow, that art is no better at one age than at another, but only different; that it is subject to modification, but certainly not to development; may we not safely accept this stationary quality as a proof that there does exist, out of sight, unattained and unattainable, a positive norm of poetic beauty? We cannot define it, but in each generation all excellence must be the result of a relation to it. It is the moon, heavily wrapt up in clouds, and impossible exactly to locate, yet revealed by the light it throws on distant portions of the sky. At all events, it appears to me that this is the only theory by which we can justify a continued interest in literature when it is attacked, now on one side, now on another, by the vicissitudes of fashion.

The essays which are here collected deal, for the most part, with figures in the history of English literature which have suffered from the changes of fortune and the instability of taste. In every case, there has been something which is calculated to attract the sympathy and interest of one who, like myself, has been closely concerned with two distinct but not unrelated branches of his subject, the literary character and the literary craft. More than fifty years have passed—like a cloud, like a dream!—since

I first saw my name printed below a passage of critical opinion. How many reputations, within that half-century, have not been exalted, how many have not been depressed! We have seen Tennyson advanced beyond Virgil and Victor Hugo beyond Homer. We have seen the latest freak of futurism preferred to *The Lotus Eaters*, and the first *Légende des Siècles* rejected as unreadable. In face of this whirlwind of doctrine the public ceases to know whether it is on its head or its feet—"its trembling tent all topsy-turvy wheels," as an Elizabethan has it. To me it seems that security can only be found in an incessant exploration of the by-ways of literary history and analysis of the vagaries of literary character. To pursue this analysis and this exploration without bewilderment and without prejudice is to sum up the pleasures of a life devoted to books.

August 1919.

THE SHEPHERD OF THE OCEAN

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Three hundred years have gone by to-day since Sir Walter Raleigh was beheaded, in presence of a vast throng of spectators, on the scaffold of Old Palace Yard in Westminster. General Gordon said that England is what her adventurers have made her, and there is not in all English history a more shining and violent specimen of the adventurous type than Raleigh. I am desired to deliver a brief panegyric on this celebrated freebooter, and I go behind the modern definition of the word "panegyric" (as a pompous and ornamented piece of rhetoric) to its original significance, which was, as I take it, the reminder, to a great assembly of persons, of the reason why they have been brought together in the name of a man long dead. Therefore I shall endeavour, in the short space of time allotted to me, not so much to eulogise as to explain and to define what Sir Walter Raleigh was and represents.

I suggest, therefore, before we touch upon any of the details of his career and character, that the central feature of Raleigh, as he appears to us after three hundred years, is his unflinching determination to see the name of England written across the forehead of the world. Others before him had been patriots of the purest order, but Raleigh was the first man who laid it down, as a formula, that "England shall by the favour of God resist, repel and

[1] Address delivered at the Mansion House, October 29th, 1918, on occasion of the Tercentenary of Sir Walter Raleigh's death.

confound all whatsoever attempts against her sacred kingdom." He had no political sense nor skill in statecraft. For that we go to the Burghleys or the Cecils, crafty men of experience and judgment. But he understood that England had enemies and that those enemies must be humbled and confounded. He understood that the road of England's greatness, which was more to him than all other good things, lay across the sea. The time was ripe for the assertion of English liberty, of English ascendancy, too; and the opportunity of the moment lay in "those happy hands which the Holy Ghost hath guided," the fortunate adventurers. Of these Raleigh was the most eminent as he was also, in a sense, the most unfortunate.

A heavy shadow lay all over the Western world, the shadow of a fierce bird of prey hovering over its victim. Ever since Ferdinand expelled the Moors out of Granada, Spain had been nursing insensate dreams of universal empire. She was endeavouring to destroy the infant system of European civilisation by every means of brutality and intrigue which the activity of her arrogance could devise. The Kings of Spain, in their ruthless ambition, encouraged their people in a dream of Spanish world-dominion. Their bulletins had long "filled the earth with their vainglorious vaunts, making great appearance of victories"; they had spread their propaganda "in sundry languages in print," distributing braggart pamphlets in which they boasted, for the benefit of neutrals, of their successes against England, France, and Italy. They had "abused and tormented" the wretched inhabitants of the Low Countries, and they held that the force of arms which they brandished would weigh against justice, humanity, and freedom in the servitude which they meant to inflict upon Europe. It was to be *Spanien über alles*.

But there was one particular nation against which the malignity of the great enemy blazed most fiercely. The

King of Spain blasphemously regarded himself as the instrument of God, and there was one country which more than the rest frustrated his pious designs. This was England, and for that reason England was more bitterly hated than any other enemy. The Spaniards did "more greedily thirst after English blood than after the lives of any other people of Europe." The avowed purpose of Castile was to destroy that maritime supremacy of England on which the very existence of the English State depends. The significance of Sir Walter Raleigh consists in the clairvoyance with which he perceived and the energy with which he combated this monstrous assumption. Other noble Englishmen of his time, and before his time, had been clear-sighted and had struck hard against the evil tyranny of Spanish dynastic militarism, but no other man before or since was so luminously identified with resistance. He struts upon the stage of battle with the limelight full upon him. The classic writing of the crisis is contained in the *Last Fight of the Revenge at Sea* of 1591, where the splendid defiance and warning of the Preface are like trumpets blown to the four quarters of the globe. Raleigh stands out as the man who above all others laboured, as he said, "against the ambitious and bloody pretences of the Spaniards, who, seeking to devour all nations, shall be themselves devoured."

There is a blessing upon the meek of the earth, but I do not present Raleigh to you as a humble-minded man. In that wonderful Elizabethan age there were blossoming, side by side, the meekness of Hooker, the subtlety of Bacon, the platonic dream of Spenser, the imperturbable wisdom of Shakespeare. Raleigh had no part in any of these, and to complain of that would be to grumble because a hollyhock is neither a violet nor a rose. He had his enemies during his life and his detractors ever since, and we may go so far as to admit that he deserves them. He

in nature," as he craftily said. When Raleigh returned after his last miserable failure in May 1617, the monarch spared no sneer and no reproof to the pirate of the seas. Of course, the King was right; there was no mine of diamonds, no golden city. But the immense treasures that haunted Raleigh's dreams were more real than reality; they existed in the future; he looked far ahead, and our sympathies to-day, and our gratitude also, are all for the noble and valorous knight who sailed out into the West searching for an unknown El Dorado.

It is not so easy to defend the character of our hero against those who, like Hume, have objected to his methods in the prosecution of his designs. To Hume, as to many others before and since, Raleigh seemed "extremely defective either in solid understanding, or morals, or both." The excellent historians of the eighteenth century could not make up their minds whether he was a hero or an impostor. Did he believe in the Guiana mine, or was he, through all those strenuous years, hoodwinking the world? Had he any purpose, save to plunder the Spaniard? Perhaps his own family doubted his sanity, for his son Walter, when he charged the Spanish settlement at San Thomé, pointed to the house of the little colony and shouted to his men: "Come on, this is the true mine, and none but fools would look for any other!" Accusations of bad faith, of factious behaviour, of disloyal intrigue, were brought up against Sir Walter over and over again during the "day of his tempestuous life, drawn on into an evening" of ignominy and blood. These charges were the "inmost and soul-piercing wounds" of which he spoke, still "aching," still "uncured."

There is no need to recount to you the incidents of his life, but I may remind you that after the failure of the latest expedition to South America the Privy Council, under pressure from the Spanish Ambassador, gave orders

to Sir Lewis Stukeley to bring the body of Sir Walter Raleigh speedily to London. This was the culmination of his fall, since, three days after Raleigh landed at Plymouth, the King had assured Spain that "not all those who have given security for Raleigh can save him from the gallows." His examination followed, and the publication of the *Apology for the Voyage to Guiana.* The trial dragged on, while James I., in a manner almost inconceivable, allowed himself to be hurried and bullied by the insolent tyrant Philip II. If the English King did not make haste to execute Raleigh the Spaniards would fetch him away and hang him in Madrid. In these conditions, and clutching at life as a man clutches at roots and branches when he is sliding down a precipice, the conduct of Raleigh has given cause to his critics to blaspheme. He wriggled like an eel, he pretended to be sick, he pretended to be mad, in order to protract his examination. He prevaricated about his mine, about the French alliance, about the Spanish treaties, about his stores and instruments. Did he believe, or did he not believe, in the Empire of the Inca, in the Amazons or Republic of Women, in the gold lying hidden in the hard white spar of El Dorado? We do not know, and his own latest efforts at explanation only cloud our counsel. He was perhaps really a little mad at last, his feverish brain half-crazed by the movement on land and sea of the triumphant wealth of Spain.

Let us never overlook that the master-passion of his whole career was hatred of this tyrannous prosperity of England's most formidable rival. He acted impulsively, and even unjustly; there was much in his methods that a cool judgment must condemn; but he was fighting, with his back to the wall, in order that the British race should not be crowded out of existence by "the proud Iberian." He saw that if Spain were permitted to extend her military and commercial supremacy unchecked, there would be an

end to civilisation. Democracy was a thing as yet undeveloped, but the seeds of it were lying in the warm soil of English liberty, and Raleigh perceived, more vehemently than any other living man, that the complete victory of Spain would involve the shipwreck of England's hopes of future prosperity. Nor was he exclusively interested in England, though all his best hopes were ours. When he had been a lad at Oxford he had broken away from his studies in 1569 to help the Protestant princes as a gentleman volunteer in France, and he took part in the famous battle of Jarnac. He is supposed to have fought in France for six years. From early youth his mind was "bent on military glory," and always in opposition to Spain. His escape from the bloody Vespers of Saint Bartholomew had given him a deep distrust of the policy of Rome. The Spaniard had "abused and tormented" the wretched inhabitants of Flanders. Sir Walter Raleigh dreamed that by the combination in arms of England, France, and the Low Countries, the Spaniards "might not only be persuaded to live in peace, but all their swelling and overflowing streams might be brought back into their natural channels and old banks."

Raleigh stood out, as he put it himself, against "the continuance of this boundless ambition in mortal men." The rulers in Madrid, transported by their own arrogance, had determined to impose their religion, their culture, their form of government, on the world. It was a question whether the vastly superior moral and intellectual energy of England and France would not be crushed beneath the heel of Spain. Raleigh was ready to sacrifice everything, to imperil his own soul, to prevent that. He says you might as well "root out the Christian religion altogether" as join "the rest of all Europe to Spain." In his zeal to prevent "the continuance of this boundless ambition in mortal men," he lent himself to acts which we must not

attempt to condone. There is no use in trying to explain away the facts of his cruel and even savage fanaticism in Ireland when he was governor of Munster. He was always apt to be abruptly brutal to a man who crossed his path. But even his Irish career offers aspects on which we may dwell with pure pleasure. Nothing could be more romantic than those adventures, like the feats of a paladin of the Faërie Queen, which he encountered in the great wood of Lismore; while the story of how he carried off Lord and Lady Roche from their breakfast-table in their own castle of Ballyinharsh, and how he rode with them up ravines and round precipices in that mad flight from their retainers, is as rousing as any scene ever imagined by Dumas *père*.

Raleigh called himself the Shepherd of the Ocean, and the name fits him well, even though his flock were less like sheep than like a leash of hunting leopards. His theory was that with a pack of small and active pinnaces he could successfully hunt the lumbering Spanish galleons without their being able to hit back. He was, in contradistinction to many preceding English admirals, a cautious fighter at sea, and he says, in a striking passage of the *History of the World*, written towards the end of his career, "to clap ships together without any consideration belongs rather to a madman than to a man of war." He must have taken the keenest interest in the gigantic failure of the Felicissima Armada in 1588, but, tantalisingly enough, we have no record of his part in it. On the other hand, the two finest of his prose pamphlets, the *Relation of the Action in Cadiz Harbour* and the incomparable *Report on the Fight in the Revenge*, supply us with ample materials for forming an idea of his value as a naval strategist. Raleigh's earliest biographer, Oldys the antiquary, speaks of him as "raising a grove of laurels out of the sea," and it is certainly upon that element that he reaches his highest effect of prominence. It was at sea that he could

give fullest scope to his hatred of the tyrannous prosperity of Spain. He had to be at once a gamekeeper and a poacher; he had to protect the legitimate interests of English shipping against privateers and pirates, while he was persuaded to be, or felt himself called upon to become, no little of a pirate himself. He was a passionate advocate of the freedom of the seas, and those who look upon Raleigh as a mere hot-brained enthusiast should read his little book called *Observations on Trade and Commerce*, written in the Tower, and see what sensible views he had about the causes of the depression of trade. These sage opinions did not check him, or his fleets of hunting-pinnaces, from lying in wait for the heavy wallowing plate-ships, laden with Indian carpets and rubies and sandalwood and ebony, which came swinging up to the equator from Ceylon or Malabar. The "freedom of the seas" was for Raleigh's ship, the *Roebuck;* it was by no means for the *Madre de Dios*. We find these moral inconsistencies in the mind of the best of adventurers.

A sketch of Raleigh's character would be imperfect indeed if it contained no word concerning his genius as a coloniser. One of his main determinations, early in life, was "to discover and conquer unknown lands, and take possession of them in the Queen's name." We celebrate in Sir Walter Raleigh one of the most intelligent and imaginative of the founders of our colonial empire. The English merchantmen before his time had been satisfied with the determination to grasp the wealth of the New World as it came home to Spain; it had not occurred to them to compete with the great rival at the fountain-head of riches. Even men like Drake and Frobisher had been content with a policy of forbidding Spain, as the poet Wither said, "to check our ships from sailing where they please." South America was already mainly in Spanish hands, but North America was still open to invasion. It

was Raleigh's half-brother, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, who first thought of planting an English settlement in what is now the United States, in 1578. But Gilbert had "no luck at sea," as Queen Elizabeth observed, and it was Raleigh who, in 1584, took up the scheme of colonisation. He did not drop it until the death of Elizabeth, when, under the east wind of the new *régime*, the blossom of his colonial enterprises flagged.

The motion for the ceremony of to-day originated with the authorities of an important American city, which proudly bears the name of our adventurer. The earliest settlement in what are now the United States was made at Roanoke, in Virginia, on a day which must always be prominent in the annals of civilisation, August 17th, 1585. But this colony lasted only ten months, and it was not until nearly two years later that the fourth expedition which Raleigh sent out succeeded in maintaining a perilous foothold in the new country. This was the little trembling taper to which his own name was given, the twinkling spark which is now the flourishing city of Raleigh in North Carolina. We may well marvel at the pertinacity with which Sir Walter persisted, in the face of innumerable difficulties, in sending out one colonising fleet after another, although, contrary to common legend, he himself never set foot in North America. It was fortunate that at this period of his career he was wealthy, for the attempts to plant settlements in the vast region which he named Virginia cost him more than £40,000. We note at all turns of his fortune his extraordinary tenacity of purpose, which he illustrated, as though by a motto, in the verses he addressed to a comrade towards the end of his imprisonment in the Tower:—

"Change not! to change thy fortune 'tis too late;
Who with a manly faith resolves to die
May promise to himself a lasting State,
Though not so great, yet free from infamy."

So we may think of him in his prime, as he stood on the Hoe of Plymouth twenty years before, a gallant figure of a man, bedizened with precious stones, velvets, and embroidered damasks, shouting his commands to his captains in a strong Devonshire accent. We think of him resolutely gazing westward always, with the light of the sea in his eyes.

We come to the final scene which we are here to-day to commemorate. Little honour to the rulers of England in 1618 redounds from it, and yet we may feel that it completed and even redeemed from decay the character of Raleigh. This tragedy, which was almost a murder, was needed to round off the accomplishment of so strange and frantic a career of romantic violence, and to stamp it with meaning. If Raleigh had been thrown from his horse or had died of the ague in his bed, we should have been depressed by the squalid circumstances, we should have been less conscious than we are now of his unbroken magnanimity. His failures and his excesses had made him unpopular throughout England, and he was both proud and peevish in his recognition of the fact. He declared that he was "nothing indebted" to the world, and again that "the common people are evil judges of honest things." But the thirteen years of his imprisonment caused a reaction. People forgot how troublesome he had been and only recollected his magnificence. They remembered nothing but that he had spent his whole energy and fortune in resisting the brutality and avarice of the Spaniard.

Then came the disgraceful scene of his cross-examination at Westminster, and the condemnation by his venal judges at the order of a paltry king. It became known, or shrewdly guessed, that Spain had sent to James I. a hectoring alternative that Raleigh must be executed in London or sent alive for a like purpose to Madrid. The trial was a cowardly and ignominious submission of the English

Government to the insolence of England's hereditary enemy. Raleigh seemed for the moment to have failed completely, yet it was really like the act of Samson, who slew more men at his death than in all his life. Samuel Pepys, who had some fine intuitions at a time when the national *moral* was very low, spoke of Raleigh as being "given over, as a sacrifice," to our enemies. This has been, in truth, the secret of his unfailing romantic popularity, and it is the reason of the emotion which has called us together here three hundred years after his death upon the scaffold.

THE SONGS OF SHAKESPEARE

THE SONGS OF SHAKESPEARE

Among the "co-supremes and stars of love" which form the constellated glory of our greatest poet there is one small splendour which we are apt to overlook in our general survey. But, if we isolate it from other considerations, it is surely no small thing that Shakespeare created and introduced into our literature the Dramatic Song. If with statistical finger we turn the pages of all his plays, we shall discover, not perhaps without surprise, that these contain not fewer than fifty strains of lyrical measure. Some of the fifty, to be sure, are mere star-dust, but others include some of the very jewels of our tongue. They range in form from the sophisticated quatorzains of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (where, however, comes "Who is Silvia?") to the reckless snatches of melody in *Hamlet*. But all have a character which is Shakespearean, and this regardless of the question so often raised, and so incapable of reply, as to whether some of the wilder ones are Shakespeare's composition or no. Whoever originally may have written such scraps as "They bore him bare-faced on the bier" and "Come o'er the bourne, Bessy, to me," the spirit of Shakespeare now pervades and possesses them.

Our poet was a prodigious innovator in this as in so many other matters. Of course, the idea and practice of musical interludes in plays was not quite novel. In Shakespeare's early youth that remarkable artist in language, John Lyly, had presented songs in several of his plays, and these were notable for what his contemporary, Henry Upchear, called "their labouring beauty." We may notice that Lyly's

songs were not printed till long after Shakespeare's death, but doubtless he had listened to them. Peele and Greene had brilliant lyrical gifts, but they did not exercise them in their dramas, nor did Lodge, whose novel of *Rosalynde* (1590) contains the only two precedent songs which we could willingly add to Shakespeare's juvenile repertory. But while I think it would be rash to deny that the lyrics of Lodge and Lyly had their direct influence on the style of Shakespeare, neither of those admirable precursors conceived the possibility of making the Song an integral part of the development of the drama. This was Shakespeare's invention, and he applied it with a technical adroitness which had never been dreamed of before and was never rivalled after.

This was not apprehended by the early critics of our divine poet, and has never yet, perhaps, received all the attention it deserves. We may find ourselves bewildered if we glance at what the eighteenth-century commentators said, for instance, about the songs in *Twelfth Night.* They called the adorable rhapsodies of the Clown "absurd" and "unintelligible"; "O Mistress mine" was in their ears "meaningless"; "When that I was" appeared to them "degraded buffoonery." They did not perceive the close and indispensable connection between the Clown's song and the action of the piece, although the poet had been careful to point out that it was a moral song "dulcet in contagion," and too good, except for sarcasm, to be wasted on Sir Andrew and Sir Toby. The critics neglected to note what the Duke says about "Come away, come away, Death," and they prattled in their blindness as to whether this must not really have been sung by Viola, all the while insensible to the poignant dramatic value of it as warbled by the ironic Clown in the presence of the blinded pair. But indeed the whole of *Twelfth Night* is burdened with melody; behind every garden-door a lute is tinkling, and

at each change of scene some unseen hand is overheard touching a harp-string. The lovely, infatuated lyrics arrive, dramatically, to relieve this musical tension at its height.

Rather different, and perhaps still more subtle, is the case of *A Winter's Tale*, where the musical obsession is less prominent, and where the songs are all delivered from the fantastic lips of Autolycus. Here again the old critics were very wonderful. Dr. Burney puts "When daffodils begin to peer" and "Lawn as white as driven snow" into one bag, and flings it upon the dust-heap, as "two nonsensical songs" sung by "a pickpocket." Dr. Warburton blushed to think that such "nonsense" could be foisted on Shakespeare's text. Strange that those learned men were unable to see, not merely that the rogue-songs are intensely human and pointedly Shakespearean, but that they are an integral part of the drama. They complete the revelation of the complex temperament of Autolycus, with his passion for flowers and millinery, his hysterical balancing between laughter and tears, his impish mendacity, his sudden sentimentality, like the Clown's

> "Not a friend, not a friend greet
> My poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown!"

It is in these subtle lyrical amalgams of humour and tenderness that the firm hand of the creator of character reveals itself.

But it is in *The Tempest* that Shakespeare's supremacy as a writer of songs is most brilliantly developed. Here are seven or eight lyrics, and among them are some of the loveliest things that any man has written. What was ever composed more liquid, more elastic, more delicately fairy-like than Ariel's First Song?

> "Come unto these yellow sands,
> And then take hands:
> Curtsied when you have, and kiss'd,—
> The wild waves whist."

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That is, not "kissed the wild waves," as ingenious punctuators pretend, but, parenthetically, "kissed one another,—the wild waves being silent the while." Even fairies do not kiss waves, than which no embrace could be conceived less rewarding. Has any one remarked the echo of Marlowe here, from *Hero and Leander*,

> "when all is whist and still,
> Save that the sea playing on yellow sand
> Sends forth a rattling murmur to the land!"

But Marlowe, with all his gifts, could never have written the lyrical parts of *The Tempest*. This song is in emotional sympathy with Ferdinand, and in the truest sense dramatic, not a piece of pretty verse foisted in to add to the entertainment.

Ariel's Second Song has been compared with Webster's "Call for the robin redbreast" in *The White Devil*, but solemn as Webster's dirge is, it tolls, it does not sing to us. Shakespeare's "ditty," as Ferdinand calls it, is like a breath of the west wind over an æolian harp. Where, in any language, has ease of metre triumphed more adorably than in Ariel's Fourth Song,—"Where the bee sucks"? Dowden saw in Ariel the imaginative genius of English poetry, recently delivered from Sycorax. If we glance at Dryden's recension of *The Tempest* we may be inclined to think that the "wicked dam" soon won back her mastery. With all respect to Dryden, what are we to think of his discretion in eking out Shakespeare's insufficiencies with such staves as this :—

> "Upon the floods we'll sing and play
> And celebrate a halcyon day;
> Great Nephew Aeolus make no noise,
> Muzzle your roaring boys."

and so forth? What had happened to the ear of England in seventy years?

As a matter of fact the perfection of dramatic song scarcely survived Shakespeare himself. The early Jacobeans, Heywood, Ford, and Dekker in particular, broke out occasionally in delicate ditties. But most playwrights, like Massinger, were persistently pedestrian. The only man who came at all close to Shakespeare as a lyrist was John Fletcher, whose "Lay a garland on my hearse" nobody could challenge if it were found printed first in a Shakespeare quarto. The three great songs in "Valentinian" have almost more splendour than any of Shakespeare's, though never quite the intimate beauty, the singing spontaneity of "Under the greenwood tree" or "Hark, hark, the lark." It has grown to be the habit of anthologists to assert Shakespeare's right to "Roses, their sharp spikes being gone." The mere fact of its loveliness and perfection gives them no authority to do so; and to my ear the rather stately procession of syllables is reminiscent of Fletcher. We shall never be certain; and who would not swear that "Hear, ye ladies that are coy" was by the same hand that wrote "Sigh no more, ladies," if we were not sure of the contrary? But the most effective test, even in the case of Fletcher, is to see whether the trill of song is, or is not, an inherent portion of the dramatic structure of the play. This is the hall-mark of Shakespeare, and perhaps of him alone.

CATHARINE TROTTER

CATHARINE TROTTER,
THE PRECURSOR OF THE BLUESTOCKINGS

The practically complete absence of the Woman of Letters from our tropical and profuse literature of the early and middle seventeenth century has often been observed with wonder. While France had her Madeleine de Scudéry and her Mlle. de Gournay and her Mère Angelique Arnauld, Englishwomen of the Stuart age ventured upon no incursions into philosophy, fiction, or theology. More and more eagerly, however, they read books; and as a consequence of reading, they began at last to write. The precious Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, hob-a-nobbed with every Muse in her amazing divagations. But the earliest professional woman of letters was Aphra Behn, the novelist and playwright, to whose genius justice has only quite lately been done by Mr. Montague Summers. Mrs. Behn died in 1689, and it seemed at first that she had left no heritage to her sex. But there presently appeared a set of female writers, who enlivened the last years of the century, but who were soon eclipsed by the wits of the age of Anne, and who have been entirely forgotten. It is to the most interesting of these "transient phantoms" that I wish to draw attention.

The extreme precocity of Catharine Trotter makes her seem to belong to the age of Dryden, but she was in reality younger than Addison and most of the other contemporaries

of Pope. She was born on August 16th, 1679, the younger daughter of a naval officer, Captain David Trotter, R.N.; her mother's maiden name had been Sarah Ballenden, probably of the well-known Catholic family of that ilk. She "had the honour of being nearly related to the illustrious families of Maitland, Duke of Lauderdale and Drummond, Earl of Perth." The Jacobite fourth Earl of Perth seems to have been the patron of Captain Trotter, of whom he wrote in 1684 that he was "an ornament to his country." Apparently the gallant captain was attached to Trinity House, where his probity and integrity earned him the epithet of "honest David," and where he attracted the notice of George, first Lord Dartmouth, when that rising statesman was appointed Master. Captain Trotter had served the Crown from his youth, "with great gallantry and fidelity, both by land and sea," and had been very successful in the Dutch wars. He had a brother who was a commander in the Navy. We get an impression of high respectability in the outer, but not outermost, circles of influential Scottish society. Doubtless the infancy of Catharine was spent in conditions of dependent prosperity.

These conditions were not to last. When she was four years old Lord Dartmouth started on the famous expedition to demolish Tangier, and he took Captain Trotter with him as his commodore. In this affair, as before, the captain distinguished himself by his ability, and instead of returning to London after Tangier he was recommended to King Charles II. as the proper person to convoy the fleet of the Turkey Company to its destination. Apparently it was understood that this would be the final reward of his services and that he was to "make his fortune" out of the Turks. Unhappily, after convoying his charge safely to Scanderoon, he fell sick of the plague that was raging there, and died, in the course of January 1684, in company with all the other officers of his ship. Every misfortune now ensued;

the purser, who was thus left to his own devices, helped himself to the money destined for the expenses of the voyage, while, to crown all, the London goldsmith in whose hands the captain had left his private fortune took this occasion to go bankrupt. The King, in these melancholy circumstances, granted an Admiralty pension to the widow, but when he died early in the following year this was no longer paid, and the unfortunate ladies of the Trotter family might well murmur :—

> "One mischief brings another on his neck,
> As mighty billows tumble in the seas."

From the beginning of her fifth year, then, Catharine experienced the precarious lot of those who depend for a livelihood on the charity of more or less distant relatives. We dimly see a presentable mother piteously gathering up such crumbs as fell from the tables of the illustrious families with whom she was remotely connected. But the Duke of Lauderdale himself was now dead, and the Earl of Perth had passed the zenith of his power. No doubt in the seventeenth century the protection of poor relations was carried on more systematically than it is to-day, and certainly Mrs. Trotter contrived to live and to bring up her two daughters genteelly. The first years were the worst; the accession of William III. brought back to England and to favour Gilbert Burnet, who became Bishop of Salisbury in 1688, when Catharine was nine years old. Mrs. Trotter found a patron and perhaps an employer in the Bishop, and when Queen Anne came to the throne her little pension was renewed.

There is frequent reference to money in Catharine Trotter's writings, and the lack of it was the rock upon which her gifts were finally wrecked. With a competency she might have achieved a much more prominent place in English literature than she could ever afford to reach. She offers a curious

instance of the depressing effect of poverty, and we get the impression that she was never, during her long and virtuous career, lifted above the carking anxiety which deadens the imagination. As a child, however, she seems to have awakened hopes of a high order. She was a prodigy, and while little more than an infant she displayed an illumination in literature which was looked upon, in that age of female darkness, as quite a portent. She taught herself French, "by her own application without any instructor," but was obliged to accept some assistance in acquiring Latin and logic. The last-mentioned subject became her particular delight, and at a very tender age she drew up "an abstract" of that science "for her own use." Thus she prepared for her future communion with Locke and with Leibnitz. When she was very small, in spite of frequent conferences with learned members of the Church of England, she became persuaded of the truth of Catholicism and joined the Roman communion. We may conjecture that this coincided with the conversion of her kinsman, Lord Chancellor Perth, but as events turned out it cannot but have added to the sorrows of that much-tried woman, her mother. (It should be stated that Catharine resumed the Anglican faith when she was twenty-eight years of age.)

She was in her tenth year when the unhappy reign of James II. came to a close. Mrs. Trotter's connections were now in a poor plight. The new Earl of Lauderdale was in great distress for money; Lord Dartmouth, abandoned by the King in his flight, was thrown into the Tower, where he died on October 25th, 1691, in which year the estates of the Earl of Perth were sequestered and he himself hunted out of the country. Ruin simultaneously fell on all the fine friends of our infant prodigy, and we can but guess how it affected her. Yet there were plenty of other Jacobites left in London, and Catharine's first public appearance shows that she cultivated their friendship. She published

in 1693 a copy of verses addressed to Mr. Bevil Higgons on the occasion of his recovery from the smallpox; she was then fourteen years of age. Higgons was a young man of twenty-three, who had lately returned from the exiled court in France, where he had distinguished himself by his agreeable manners, and who had just made a name for himself by poems addressed to Dryden and by a prologue to Congreve's *Old Batchelor*. He was afterwards to become famous for a little while as a political historian. Catharine Trotter's verses are bad, but she addresses Higgons as "lovely youth," and claims his gratitude for her tribute in terms which are almost boisterous. This poem was not only her introduction to the public, but, through Bevil Higgons, was probably the channel of her acquaintance with Congreve and Dryden.

Throughout her life she was fond of writing letters to celebrated people; she now certainly wrote to Congreve and doubtless to Dryden. A freedom in correspondence ran in the family. Her poor mother is revealed to us as always "renewing her application" to somebody or other. We next find the youthful poet in relation with the Earl of Dorset, from whom she must have concealed her Jacobite propensities. Dorset was the great public patron of poetry under William III., and Catharine Trotter, aged sixteen, having composed a tragedy, appealed to him for support. It was very graciously granted, and *Agnes de Castro*, in five acts and in blank verse, "written by a young lady," was produced at the Theatre Royal in 1695, under the "protection" of Charles Earl of Dorset and Middlesex, Lord Chamberlain of His Majesty's Household. The event caused a considerable commotion. No woman had written for the English stage since the death of Mrs. Behn, and curiosity was much excited. Mrs. Verbruggen, that enchanting actress, but in male attire, recited a clever, ranting epilogue at the close of the performance, in which she said :—

"'tis whispered here
Our Poetess is virtuous, young and fair,"

but the secret was an open one. Wycherley, who contributed verses, knew all about it, and so did Mrs. Manley, while Powell and Colley Cibber were among the actors. We may be sure that little Mistress Trotter's surprising talents were the subjects of much discussion at Will's Coffee House, and that the question of securing her for the rival theatre was anxiously debated at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Her success in *Agnes de Castro* was the principal asset which Drury Lane had to set that season against Congreve's splendid adventure with *Love for Love*.

Agnes de Castro is an immature production, and shows a juvenile insensibility to plagiarism, since the subject and treatment are borrowed implicitly from a French novel by Mlle. de Brillac, published in Paris and London a few years before.[1] The conception of court life at Coimbra in the fourteenth century is that of this French lady, and is innocent of Portuguese local colour. But, as the dramatic work of a girl of sixteen, the play is rather extraordinary for nimble movement and adroit theatrical arrangements. It is evident that Catharine Trotter was well versed in the stage traditions of her own day, and we may wonder how a highly respectable girl of sixteen found her opportunity. The English playhouse under William III. was no place for a very young lady, even if she wore a mask. There is a good deal of meritorious character-drawing in *Agnes de Castro*. The conception of a benevolent and tenderly forgiving Princess is well contrasted with the fierce purity of Agnes and the infatuation of the Prince. Towards the close of the first act there is a capital scene of exquisite confusion between this generous and distracted

[1] Around the story of Agnes de Castro there gathered a whole literature of fiction, which Mr. Montague Summers has investigated in his *Works of Aphra Behn*, Vol. V. pp. 211–212.

trio. The opening of the third act, between Elvira and her brother Alvaro, is not at all young-ladyish, and has some strong turns of feeling. The end of the play, with the stabbing of the Princess and the accusation of Agnes by Elvira, is puerile, but was doubtless welcome to a sentimental audience. It is a bad play, but not at all an unpromising one.

Early in 1696 *Agnes de Castro*, still anonymous, was published as a book, and for the next five or six years we find Catharine Trotter habitually occupied in writing for the stage. Without question she did so professionally, though in what way dramatists at the close of the seventeenth century lived by their pens is difficult to conjecture. A very rare play, *The Female Wits; or, the Triumvirate of Poets*, the authorship of which has hitherto defied conjecture, was acted at Drury Lane after Catharine Trotter had been tempted across to Lincoln's Inn Fields, and is evidently inspired by the intense jealousy which smouldered between the two great houses. The success of Miss Trotter incited two older ladies to compete with her; these were Mrs. Delariviere Manley, who was a discarded favourite of Barbara Villiers, and fat Mrs. Mary Pix, the stage-struck consort of a tailor. These rather ridiculous women professed themselves followers of Catharine, and they produced plays of their own not without some success. With her they formed the trio of Female Wits who were mocked in the lively but, on the whole, rather disappointing play I have just mentioned, in the course of which it is spitefully remarked of Calista—who is Miss Trotter—that she has "made no small struggle in the world to get into print," and is "now in such a state of wedlock to pen and ink that it will be very difficult" for her "to get out of it."

In acting *The Female Wits* Mrs. Temple, who had played the Princess in *Agnes de Castro*, took the part of Calista,

and doubtless, in the coarse fashion of those days, made up exactly like poor Catharine Trotter, who was described as "a Lady who pretends to the learned Languages, and assumes to herself the name of a Critic." This was a character, however, which she would not have protested against with much vigour, for she had now quite definitely taken up the position of a reformer and a pioneer. She posed as the champion of women's intellectual rights, and she was accepted as representing in active literary work the movement which Mary Astell had recently foreshadowed in her remarkable *Serious Proposal to Ladies* of 1694. We turn again to *The Female Wits*, and we find Marsilia (Mrs. Manley) describing Calista to Mrs. Wellfed (Mrs. Pix) as "the vainest, proudest, senseless Thing! She pretends to grammar! writes in mood and figure! does everything methodically!" Yet when Calista appears on the stage, Mrs. Manley rushes across to fling her arms around her and to murmur: "O charmingest Nymph of all Apollo's Train, let me embrace thee!" Later on Calista says to Mrs. Pix, the fat tailoress, "I cannot but remind you, Madam . . . I read Aristotle in his own language"; and of a certain tirade in a play of Ben Jonson she insists: "I know it so well, as to have turn'd it into Latin." Mrs. Pix admits her own ignorance of all these things; she "can go no further than the eight parts of speech." This brings down upon her an icy reproof from Calista: "Then I cannot but take the Freedom to say . . . you impose upon the Town." We get the impression of a preciseness of manner and purpose which must have given Catharine a certain air of priggishness, not entirely unbecoming, perhaps, but very strange in that loose theatre of William III.

Accordingly, in her next appearance, we find her complaining to the Princess (afterwards Queen Anne) that she has become "the mark of ill Nature" through recom-

mending herself "by what the other Sex think their peculiar Prerogative"—that is, intellectual distinction. Catharine Trotter was still only nineteen years of age when she produced her tragedy of *Fatal Friendship*, the published copy of which (1698) is all begarlanded with evidences of her high moral purpose in the shape of a succession of "applausive copies" of verses. In these we are told that she had "checked the rage of reigning vice that had debauched the stage." This was an allusion to the great controversy then just raised by Jeremy Collier in his famous *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the Stage*, in which all the dramatists of the day were violently attacked for their indecency. Catharine Trotter has the courage to side with Collier, and the tact to do so without quarrelling with her male colleagues. She takes the side of the decent women.

> "You as your Sex's champion art come forth
> To fight their quarrel and assert their worth,"

one of her admirers exclaims, and another adds :—

> "You stand the first of stage-reformers too."

The young poetess aimed at reconciling the stage with virtue and at vindicating the right of woman to assume "the tragic laurel."

This was the most brilliant moment in the public career of our bluestocking. *Fatal Friendship* enjoyed a success which Catharine Trotter was not to taste again, and of all her plays it is the only one which has ever been reprinted. It is very long and extremely sentimental, and written in rather prosy blank verse. Contemporaries said that it placed Miss Trotter in the forefront of British drama, in company with Congreve and Granville "the polite," who had written a *She-Gallants*, which was everything that Miss Trotter did not wish her plays to be. *Fatal Friendship*

has an ingenious plot, in which the question of money takes a prominence very unusual in tragedy. Almost every character in the piece is in reduced circumstances. Felicia, sister to Belgard (who is too poor to maintain her), is wooed by the wealthy Roquelaure, although she is secretly married to Gramont, who is also too poor to support a wife. Belgard, afraid that Gramont will make love to Felicia (that is, to his own secret wife), persuades him—in order that his best friend, Castalio, may be released from a debtor's prison—bigamously to marry Lamira, a wealthy widow. But Castalio is in love with Lamira, and is driven to frenzy by Gramont's illegal marriage. It all depends upon income in a manner comically untragical. The quarrel between the friends in the fifth act is an effective piece of stage-craft, but the action is spoiled by a ridiculous general butchery at the close of all. However, the audience was charmed, and even "the stubbornest could scarce deny their Tears."

Fatal Friendship was played at the Lincoln's Inn Theatre, and no doubt it was Congreve who brought Miss Trotter over from Drury Lane. His warm friendship for her had unquestionably a great deal to do with her success and with the jealousy of her rivals. A letter exists in which the great dramatist acknowledges, in 1697, the congratulations of his young admirer, and it breathes an eager cordiality. Congreve requested Betterton to present him to Catharine Trotter, and his partiality for her company is mentioned by several writers. The spiteful author of *The Female Wits* insinuates that Congreve made the looking-over of Catharine's scenes "his pretence for daily visits." Another satirist, in 1698, describes Congreve sitting very gravely with his hat over his eyes, "together with the two she-things called Poetesses which write for his house," half-hidden from the public in a little side-box. Farquhar, too, seeing the celebrated writer of *Fatal Friendship*

in the theatre on the third night of the performance of his *Love and a Bottle*, had "his passions wrought so high" by a sight of the beautiful author that he wrote her a letter in which he called her "one of the fairest of the sex, and the best judge." If Catharine Trotter, as the cynosure of delicacy, at the age of nineteen, sat through *Love and a Bottle* without a blush, even *her* standard of decency was not very exacting. But in all this rough, coarse world of wit her reputation never suffered a rebuff.

Encouraged by so much public and private attention, our young dramatist continued to work with energy and conscientiousness. But her efforts were forestalled by an event, or rather a condition of the national temper, of which too little notice has been taken by literary historians. The attacks on the stage for its indecency and blasphemy had been flippantly met by the theatrical agents, but they had sunk deeply into the conscience of the people. There followed with alarming abruptness a general public repulsion against the playhouses, and to this, early in 1699, a roughly worded Royal Proclamation gave voice. During the whole of that year the stage was almost in abeyance, and even Congreve, with *The Way of the World*, was unable to woo his audience back to Lincoln's Inn. During this time of depression Catharine Trotter composed at least two tragedies, which she was unable to get performed, while the retirement of Congreve in a paroxysm of annoyance must have been a very serious disadvantage to her.

On May 1st, 1700, Dryden died, and with him a dramatic age passed away. What Miss Trotter's exact relations with the great poet had been is uncertain; she not only celebrated his death in a long elegy, in which she speaks on behalf of the Muses, but wrote another and more important poem, in which she gives very sound advice to the poetical beginner, who is to take Dryden as a model, and to be particularly careful to disdain Settle,

Durfey, and Blackmore, typical poetasters of the period. She recommends social satire to the playwright :—

> "Let the nice well-bred beau himself perceive
> The most accomplish'd, useless thing alive;
> Expose the bottle-sparks that range the town,—
> Shaming themselves with follies not their own,—
> But chief these foes to virgin innocence,
> Who, while they make to honour vain pretence,
> With all that's base and impious can dispense."

Honour to those who aim high and execute boldly!

> "If Shakespeare's spirit, with transporting fire,
> The animated scene throughout inspire;
> If in the piercing wit of Vanbrugh drest,
> Each sees his darling folly made a jest;
> If Garth's and Dryden's genius, through each line,
> In artful praise and well-turn'd satire shine,—
> To *us* ascribe the immortal sacred flame."

In this dead period of the stage Catharine Trotter found a warm friend and doubtless an efficient patron in a Lady Piers, of whom we should be glad to know more. Sir George Piers, the husband of this lady, was an officer of rank under the Duke of Marlborough, later to become useful to Catharine Trotter. Meanwhile the latter returned to the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, where, in 1701, under the patronage of Lord Halifax—Pope's "Bufo"—she produced her third tragedy, *The Unhappy Penitent*. The dedication of this play to Halifax is a long and interesting essay on the poetry of the age. The author passes Dryden, Otway, Congreve, and Lee under examination, and finds technical blemishes in them all :—

"The inimitable Shakespeare seems alone secure on every side from an attack. I speak not here of faults against the rules of poetry, but against the natural Genius. He had all the images of nature present to him, studied her thoroughly, and boldly copied all her various features, for though he has chiefly exerted himself on the more

masculine passions, 'tis as the choice of his judgment, not the restraint of his genius, and he has given us as a proof he could be every way equally admirable."

Lady Piers wrote the prologue to *The Unhappy Penitent* in verses better turned than might have been expected. She did not stint praise to her young friend, whom she compares to the rising sun :—

> "Like him, bright Maid, Thy great perfections shine,
> As awful, as resplendent, as divine! . . .
> Minerva and Diana guard your soul!"

The Unhappy Penitent is not a pleasing performance: it is amorous and violent, but yet dull. Catharine's theory was better than her practice. Nevertheless, it seems to have been successful, for the author some time afterwards, speaking of the town's former discouragement of her dramas, remarks that "the taste is mended." Later in 1701 she brought out at Drury Lane her only comedy, *Love at a Loss,* dedicated in most enthusiastic terms to Lady Piers, to whom "I owe the greatest Blessing of my Fate," the privilege of a share in her friendship. *Love at a Loss* was made up of the comic scenes introduced into an old tragedy which the author had failed to get acted. This is not a fortunate method of construction, and the town showed no favour to *Love at a Loss.* The first and only public section of Catharine Trotter's career was now over, and she withdrew, a wayworn veteran at the age of twenty-two, to more elevated studies.

When *Love at a Loss* was published the author had already left town, and after a visit to Lady Piers in Kent she now settled at Salisbury, at the house of a physician, Dr. Inglis, who had married her only sister. Her growing intimacy with the family of Bishop Burnet may have had something to do with her determination to make this city

her home. She formed a very enthusiastic friendship with the Bishop's second lady, who was an active theologian and a very intelligent woman. Our poetess was fascinated by Mrs. Burnet. "I have not met," she writes in 1701, "such perfection in any of our sex." She now visited in the best Wiltshire society. When the famous singer, John Abell, was in Salisbury, he gave a concert at the palace, and Catharine Trotter was so enchanted that she rode out after him six miles to Tisbury to hear him sing again at Lord Arundell of Wardour's house. She had a great appreciation of the Bishop's "volatile activity." It is now that the name of Locke first occurs in her correspondence, and we gather that she came into some personal contact with him through a member of the Bishop's family—George Burnet of Kemney, in Aberdeenshire—probably a cousin, with whom she now cultivated an ardent intellectual friendship. He left England on a mission which occupied him from the middle of 1701 until 1708, and this absence, as we may suspect, alone prevented their acquaintance from ripening into a warmer feeling. The romance and tragedy of Catharine Trotter's life gather, it is plain, around this George Burnet, who was a man of brilliant accomplishments and interested, like herself, in philosophical studies.

These, it would appear, Catharine Trotter had never abandoned, but she applied herself to them closely at Salisbury, where she made some superior acquaintances. One of these was John Norris of Bemerton, whose *Theory of an Ideal and Intelligible World* had just made some sensation. By the intermediary of George Burnet she came in touch with some of the leading French writers of the moment, such as Malebranche and Madame Dacier. There is a French poet, unnamed, who understands English, but he is gone to Rome before he can be made to read *The Fatal Friendship*. Meanwhile, Catharine Trotter's

obsession with the ideas of Locke was giving some anxiety to her friends. That philosopher had published his famous *Essay on the Human Understanding* in 1690, and it had taken several years for the opposition to his views, and in particular to his theological toleration, to take effect. But in 1697 there were made a number of almost simultaneous attacks on Locke's position. The circle at Salisbury was involved in them, for one of these was written by Norris of Bemerton, and another is attributed to a member of the Burnet family. Catharine Trotter, who had studied Locke's later works with enthusiastic approval, was scandalised by the attacks, and sat down to refute them. This must have been in 1701.

Although the intellectual society of Salisbury was prominent in taking the conservative view of Locke, our bluestocking could not refrain from telling Mrs. Burnet what she had done, nor from showing her treatise to that friend under vows of confidence. But Mrs. Burnet, who was impulsive and generous, could not keep the secret; she spoke about it to the Bishop, and then to Norris of Bemerton, and finally (in June 1702) to Locke himself. Locke was at Oates, confined by his asthma; he was old and suffering, but still full of benevolence and curiosity, and he was graciously interested in his remarkable defender at Salisbury. As he could not himself travel, he sent his adopted son to call on Catharine Trotter, with a present of books; this was Peter King, still a young man, but already M.P. for Beer Alston, and later to become Lord Chancellor and the first Lord King of Ockham. George Burnet, writing from Paris, had been very insistent that Catharine should not publish her treatise, but she overruled his objections, and her *Defence of Mr. Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding* appeared anonymously in May 1702. People were wonderfully polite in those days, and Locke himself wrote to his "protectress" a charming

letter in which he told her that her *Defence* was the greatest honour my *Essay* could have procured me."

She sent her *Defence* to Leibnitz, who criticised it at considerable length :—[1]

"J'ai lu livre de Mlle. Trotter. Dans la dedicace elle exhorte M. Locke à donner des démonstrations de morale. Je crois qu'il aurait eu de la peine à y reussir. L'art de démontrer n'est pas son fait. Je tiens que nous nous appercevons sans raisonnement de ce qui est juste et injuste, comme nous nous appercevons sans raison de quelques theoremes de Geometrie; mais il est tousjours bon de venir à la démonstration. Justice et injustice ne dependent seulement de la nature humaine, mais de la nature de la substance intelligente en général; et Mlle. Trotter remarque fort bien qu'elle vient de la nature de Dieu et n'est point arbitraire. La nature de Dieu est tousjours fondée en raison."

Notwithstanding all this, the commentators of Locke appear, without exception, to ignore the *Defence*, and it was probably never much read outside the cultivated Salisbury circle.

In this year, 1702, the health of Catharine Trotter began to give her uneasiness, and it was for this reason that she left Salisbury for a while. She was once more living in that city, however, from May 1703 to March 1704, making a special study of geography. "My strength," she writes to George Burnet, "is very much impaired, and God knows whether I shall ever retrieve it." Her thoughts turned again to the stage, and in the early months of 1703 she composed her fifth and last play, the tragedy of *The Revolution in Sweden*; "but it will not be ready for the

[1] Printed in Otto Klopp's *Correspondance de Leibnitz avec l'Electrice Sophie.* Hanover, 1875.

stage," she says, "till next winter." Her interest in philosophy did not flag. She was gratified by some communications, through Burnet, with Leibnitz, and she would have liked to be the intermediary between Locke and some philosophical "gentlemen" on the Continent, probably Malebranche and Leibnitz, in a controversy. But this was hopeless, and she writes (March 16th, 1704):—

"Mr. Locke is unwilling to engage in controversy with the gentlemen you mention; for, I am informed, his infirmities have obliged him, for some time past, to desist from his serious studies, and only employ himself in lighter things, which serve to amuse and unbend the mind."

Locke, indeed, had but six months more to live, and though he retained his charming serenity of spirit he was well aware that the end approached. Never contentious or desirous of making a sensation, he was least of all, in his present precarious state, likely to enter into discussion with foreign philosophers. It does not appear that Catharine Trotter ever enjoyed the felicity of seeing in the flesh the greatest object of her homage; but he occupied most of her thoughts. She was rendered highly indignant by the efforts made by the reactionaries at Oxford and elsewhere to discourage the writings of Locke and to throw suspicion on their influence. She read over and over again his philosophical, educational, and religious treatises, and ever found them more completely to her taste. If she had enjoyed the power to do so she would have proclaimed the wisdom and majesty of Locke from every housetop, and she envied Lady Masham her free and constant intercourse with so beautiful a mind. Catharine Trotter watched, but from a distance, the extinction of a life thus honoured, which came to a peaceful end at Oates on October 28th, 1704. The following passage does not

appear—or I am much mistaken—to have attracted the attention of Locke's biographers :—

"I was very sensibly touched with the news of Mr. Locke's death. All the particulars I hear of it are that he retained his perfect senses to the last, and spoke with the same composedness and indifference on affairs as usual. His discourse was much on the different views a dying man has of worldly things; and that nothing gives him any satisfaction, but the reflection of what good he has done in his life. Lady Masham went to his chamber to speak to him on some business; when he had answered in the same manner he was accustomed to speak, he desired her to leave the room, and, immediately after she was gone, turned about and died."

She records that, after the death of Locke, Lady Masham communicated with Leibnitz, and Catharine is very indignant because a doubt had been suggested as to whether the writer's thoughts and expressions were her own. This was calculated to infuriate Catharine Trotter, who outpours in forcible terms her just indignation :—

"Women are as capable of penetrating into the grounds of things, and reasoning justly, as men are, who certainly have no advantage of us, but in their opportunities of knowledge. As Lady Masham is allowed by everybody to have great natural endowments, she has taken pains to improve them; and no doubt profited much by a long intimate society with so extraordinary a man as Mr. Locke. So that I see no reason to suspect a woman of her character would pretend to write anything that was not entirely her own. I pray, be more equitable to her sex than the generality of your's are, who, when anything is written by a woman that they cannot deny their approbation to,

are sure to rob us of the glory of it by concluding 'tis not her own."

This is the real voice of Catharine Trotter, raised to defend her sex, and conscious of the many intellectual indignities and disabilities which they suffered.

The first draft of *The Revolution in Sweden* being now completed, she sent it to Congreve, who was living very quietly in lodgings in Arundell Street. He allowed some time to go by before, on November 2nd, 1703, he acknowledged it. His criticism, which is extremely kind, is also penetrating and full. "I think the design in general," he says, "very great and noble; the conduct of it very artful, if not too full of business which may run into length and obscurity." He warns her against having too much noise of fighting on the stage in her second act, and against offending probability in the third. The fourth act is confused, and in the fifth there are too many harangues. Catharine Trotter has asked him to be frank, and so he is, but his criticism is practical and encouraging. This excellent letter deserves to be better known.

To continue the history of Miss Trotter's fifth and last play, *The Revolution in Sweden* was at length brought out at the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket, towards the close of 1704. It had every advantage which popular acting could give it, since the part of the hero, Count Arwide, was played by Betterton; that of Constantia, the heroine, by Mrs. Barry; Gustavus by Booth; and Christina by Mrs. Harcourt. In spite of this galaxy of talent, the reception of the play was unfavourable. The Duchess of Marlborough "and all her beauteous family" graced the theatre on the first night, but the public was cold and inattentive. Some passages of a particularly lofty moral tone provoked laughter. *The Revolution in Sweden*, in fact, was shown to suffer from the ineradicable faults

husband, was expected, in 1705, to close her letter by describing herself as "Sir, your very humble servant."

If George Burnet hinted of "parties" in Hanover, Catharine Trotter on her side could boast of Mr. Fenn, "a young clergyman of excellent character," who now laid an ardent siege to her heart. Embarrassed by these attentions, she took the bold step of placing the matter before Mr. Cockburn, a still younger clergyman, of even more excellent character. The letter in which she makes this ingenuous declaration as to a father confessor is one of the tenderest examples extant of the "Why don't you speak for yourself, John?" form of correspondence. Mr. Cockburn, one of the minor clergy of the Salisbury set, did speak for himself, and George Burnet having at length announced his own projected marriage with a lady of old acquaintance, Catharine Trotter hesitated no longer but accepted the hand of Mr. Cockburn. They were married early in 1708. Thackeray could have created an amusing romance out of the relations of these four poeple to one another, and in particular it would have been very interesting to see what he would have made of the character of George Burnet.

Catharine Cockburn was now, after so eventful a life of emotional and intellectual experience, still a young woman, not far past her twenty-eighth birthday. She was to survive for more than forty-three years, during which time she was to correspond much, to write persistently, and to publish whenever opportunity offered. But I do not propose to accompany her much further on her blameless career. All through her married life, which was spent at various places far from London, she existed almost like a plant in a Leyden jar. Constant genteel poverty, making it difficult for her to buy books and impossible to travel, was supported by her with dignity and patience, but it dwarfed her powers. Her later writings, on philosophy,

on morality, on the principles of the Christian religion, are so dull that merely to think of them brings tears into one's eyes. She who had sparkled as a girl with Congreve and exchanged polite amenities with Locke lived on to see modern criticism begin with Samuel Johnson and the modern novel start with Samuel Richardson, but without observing that any change had come into the world of letters. Her husband, owing to his having fallen "into a scruple about the oath of abjuration," lost his curacy and "was reduced to great difficulties in the support of his family." Nevertheless—a perfect gentleman at heart—he "always prayed for the King and Royal family by name." Meanwhile, to uplift his spirits in this dreadful condition, he is discovered engaged upon a treatise on the Mosaic deluge, which he could persuade no publisher to print. He reminds us of Dr. Primrose in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and, like him, Mr. Cockburn probably had strong views on the Whistonian doctrine.

So little mark did poor Mrs. Cockburn make on her younger contemporaries that she disappeared forthwith from literary history. Her works, especially her plays, have become so excessively rare as to be almost unprocurable. The brief narrative of her life and her activities which I have taken the liberty of presenting to-day would be hopelessly engulfed in obscurity, and we should know as little of Catharine Trotter as we do of Mary Pix, and Delariviere Manley, and many late seventeenth-century authors more eminent than they, had it not been that in 1751, two years after her death, all her papers were placed in the hands of an ingenious clergyman, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Birch, who printed them for subscribers in two thick and singularly unpleasing volumes. This private edition was never reissued, and is now itself a rare book. It is the sort of book that for two hundred and fifty years must fatally have been destroyed as lumber whenever an

old country mansion that contained it has been cleared out.

During all that time no one, so far as I can discover, has evinced the smallest interest in Catharine Trotter. We gain an idea of the blackness of her obscurity when we say that even Mr. Austin Dobson appears to have never heard of her. The champion of Locke and Clarke, the correspondent of Leibnitz and Pope, the friend of Congreve, the patroness of Farquhar, she seems to have slipped between two ages and to have lost her hold on time. But I hope her thin little lady-like ghost, still hovering in a phantom-like transparence round the recognised seats of learning, will be a little comforted at last by the polite attention of a few of my readers.

THE MESSAGE OF THE WARTONS

TWO PIONEERS OF ROMANTICISM: JOSEPH AND THOMAS WARTON[1]

THE origins of the Romantic Movement in literature have been examined so closely and so often that it might be supposed that the subject must be by this time exhausted. But no subject of any importance in literature is ever exhausted, because the products of literature grow or decay, burgeon or wither, as the generations of men apply their ever-varying organs of perception to them. I intend, with your permission, to present to you a familiar phase of the literary life of the eighteenth century from a fresh point of view, and in relation to two men whose surname warrants a peculiar emphasis of respect in the mouth of a Warton Lecturer. It is well, perhaps, to indicate exactly what it is which a lecturer proposes to himself to achieve during the brief hour in which you indulge him with your attention; it certainly makes his task the easier if he does so. I propose, therefore, to endeavour to divine for you, by scanty signs and indications, what it was in poetry, as it existed up to the period of their childhood, which was stimulating to the Wartons, and what they disapproved of in the verse which was fashionable and popular among the best readers in their day.

There is an advantage, which I think that our critics are

[1] Delivered, as the Warton Lecture, before the British Academy, October 27th, 1915.

apt to neglect, in analysing the character and causes of poetic pleasure experienced by any sincere and enthusiastic reader, at any epoch of history. We are far too much in the habit of supposing that what we—that is the most instructed and sensitive of us—admire now must always have been admired by people of a like condition. This has been one of the fallacies of Romantic criticism, and has led people as illustrious as Keats into blaming the taste of foregoing generations as if it were not only heretical, but despicable as well. Young men to-day speak of those who fifty years ago expatiated in admiration of Tennyson as though they were not merely stupid, but vulgar and almost wicked, neglectful of the fact that it was by persons exactly analogous to themselves that those portions of Tennyson were adored which the young repudiate to-day. Not to expand too largely this question of the oscillation of taste—which, however, demands more careful examination than it has hitherto received—it is always important to discover what was honestly admired at a given date by the most enthusiastic and intelligent, in other words by the most poetic, students of poetry. But to do this we must cultivate a little of that catholicity of heart which perceives technical merit wherever it has been recognised at an earlier date, and not merely where the current generation finds it.

Joseph and Thomas Warton were the sons of an Oxford professor of poetry, an old Jacobite of no observable merit beyond that of surrounding his family with an atmosphere of the study of verse. The elder brother was born in 1722, the younger in 1728. I must be forgiven if I dwell a little tediously on dates, for our inquiry depends upon the use of them. Without dates the whole point of that precedency of the Wartons, which I desire to bring out, is lost. The brothers began very early to devote themselves to the study of poetry, and in spite of the six years

which divided them, they appear to have meditated in unison. Their writings bear a close resemblance to one another, and their merits and their failures are alike identical. We have to form what broken impression we can of their early habits. Joseph is presented to us as wandering in the woodlands, lost in a melancholy fit, or waking out of it to note with ecstasy all the effects of light and colour around him, the flight of birds, the flutter of foliage, the panorama of cloudland. He and Thomas were alike in their "extreme thirst after ancient things." They avoided, with a certain disdain, the affectation of vague and conventional reference to definite objects.

Above all they read the poets who were out of fashion, and no doubt the library of their father, the Professor of Poetry, was at their disposal from a very early hour. The result of their studies was a remarkable one, and the discovery was unquestionably first made by Joseph. He was, so far as we can gather, the earliest person in the modern world of Europe to observe what vain sacrifices had been made by the classicists, and in particular by the English classicists, and as he walked enthusiastically in the forest he formed a determination to reconquer the realm of lost beauty. The moment that this instinct became a purpose, we may say that the great Romantic Movement, such as it has enlarged and dwindled down to our own day, took its start. The Wartons were not men of creative genius, and their works, whether in prose or verse, have not taken hold of the national memory. But the advance of a great army is not announced by a charge of field-marshals. In the present war, the advance of the enemy upon open cities has generally been announced by two or three patrols on bicycles, who are the heralds of the body. Joseph and Thomas Warton were the bicyclist-scouts who prophesied of an advance which was nearly fifty years delayed.

The general history of English literature in the eighteenth century offers us little opportunity for realising what the environment could be of two such lads as the Wartons, with their enthusiasm, their independence, and their revolutionary instinct. But I will take the year 1750, which is the year of Rousseau's first *Discours* and therefore the definite starting-point of European Romanticism. You will perhaps find it convenient to compare the situation of the Wartons with what is the situation to-day of some very modern or revolutionary young poet. In 1750, then, Joseph was twenty-eight years of age and Thomas twenty-two. Pope had died six years before, and this was equivalent to the death of Swinburne in the experience of our young man of to-day. Addison's death was as distant as is from us that of Matthew Arnold; and Thomson, who had been dead two years, had left *The Castle of Indolence* as an equivalent to Mr. Hardy's *Dynasts*. All the leading writers of the age of Anne—except Young, who hardly belonged to it—were dead, but the Wartons were divided from them only as we are from those of the age of Victoria. I have said that Pope was not more distant from them than Swinburne is from us, but really a more just parallel is with Tennyson. The Wartons, wandering in their woodlands, were confronted with a problem such as would be involved, to a couple of youths to-day, in considering the reputation of Tennyson and Browning.

There remains no doubt in my mind, after a close examination of such documents as remain to us, that Joseph Warton, whose attitude has hitherto been strangely neglected, was in fact the active force in this remarkable revolt against existing conventions in the world of imaginative art. His six years of priority would naturally give him an advantage over his now better-known and more celebrated brother. Moreover, we have positive evidence of the firmness of his opinions at a time when his brother

Thomas was still a child. The preface to Joseph's *Odes* of 1746 remains as a dated document, a manifesto, which admits of no question. But the most remarkable of his poems, "The Enthusiast," was stated to have been written in 1740, when he was eighteen and his brother only twelve years of age. It is, of course, possible that these verses, which bear no sign of juvenile mentality, were touched up at a later date. But this could only be a matter of diction, of revision, and we are bound to accept the definite and repeated statement of Joseph, that they were essentially composed in 1740. If we accept this as a fact, "The Enthusiast" is seen to be a document of extraordinary importance. I do not speak of the positive merit of the poem, which it would be easy to exaggerate. Gray, in a phrase which has been much discussed, dismissed the poetry of Joseph Warton by saying that he had "no choice at all." It is evident to me that Gray meant by this to stigmatise the diction of Joseph Warton, which is jejune, verbose, and poor. He had little magic in writing; he fails to express himself with creative charm. But this is not what constitutes his interest for us, which is moreover obscured by the tameness of his Miltonic-Thomsonian versification. What should arrest our attention is the fact that here, for the first time, we find unwaveringly emphasised and repeated what was entirely new in literature, the essence of romantic hysteria. "The Enthusiast" is the earliest expression of full revolt against the classical attitude which had been sovereign in all European literature for nearly a century. So completely is this expressed by Joseph Warton that it is extremely difficult to realise that he could not have come under the fascination of Rousseau, whose apprenticeship to love and idleness was now drawing to a close at Les Charmettes, and who was not to write anything characteristic until ten years later.

But these sentiments were in the air. Some of them

had vaguely occurred to Young, to Dyer, and to Shenstone, all of whom received from Joseph Warton the ardent sympathy which a young man renders to his immediate contemporaries. The Scotch resumption of ballad-poetry held the same relation to the Wartons as the so-called Celtic Revival would to a young poet to-day; the *Tea-Table Miscellany* dates from 1724, and Allan Ramsay was to the author of "The Enthusiast" what Mr. Yeats is to us. But all these were glimmerings or flashes; they followed no system, they were accompanied by no principles of selection or rejection. These we find for the first time in Joseph Warton. He not merely repudiates the old formulas and aspirations, but he defines new ones. What is very interesting to observe in his attitude to the accepted laws of poetical practice is his solicitude for the sensations of the individual. These had been reduced to silence by the neo-classic school in its determination to insist on broad Palladian effects of light and line. The didactic and moral aim of the poets had broken the springs of lyrical expression, and had replaced those bursts of enthusiasm, those indiscretions, those rudenesses which are characteristic of a romantic spirit in literature, by eloquence, by caution, by reticence and vagueness.

It is not necessary to indicate more than very briefly what the principles of the classic poetry had been. The time had passed when readers and writers in England gave much attention to the sources of the popular poetry of their day. Malherbe had never been known here, and the vigorous *Art poétique* of Boileau, which had been eagerly studied at the close of the seventeenth century, was forgotten. Even the Prefaces of Dryden had ceased to be read, and the sources of authority were now the prose of Addison and the verse of Pope. To very young readers these stood in the same relation as the writings of the post-Tennysonian critics stand now. To reject them,

to question their authority, was like eschewing the essays of Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater. In particular, the *Essay on Criticism* was still immensely admired and read; it had crystallised around cultivated opinion very much as the *Studies in the Renaissance* did from 1875 onwards. It was the last brilliant word on the aims and experiences of poetical art, and how brilliant it was can be judged by the pleasure with which we read it to-day, in spite of our total repudiation of every æsthetic dogma which it conveys. It is immortal, like every supreme literary expression, and it stands before us in the history of poetry as an enduring landmark. This was the apparently impregnable fortress which the Wartons had the temerity to bombard.

Pope had said that Nature was the best guide to judgment, but what did he mean by nature? He had meant the "rules," which he declared were "Nature methodis'd" or, as we should say, systematised. The "rules" were the maxims, rather than laws, expressed by Aristotle in a famous treatise. The poet was to follow the Stagirite, "led"—as Pope says in one of those rare lines in which he catches, in spite of himself, the Romantic accent—"led by the light of the Mæonian Star." Aristotle illustrated by Homer—that was to be the standard of all poetic expression. But literature had wandered far from Homer, and we have to think of what rules the *Essay on Criticism* laid down. The poet was to be cautious, "to avoid extremes": he must be conventional, never "singular"; there was constant reference to "Wit," "Nature," and "The Muse," and these were convertible terms. A single instance is luminous. We have the positive authority of Warburton for saying that Pope regarded as the finest effort of his skill and art as a poet the insertion of the machinery of the Sylphs into the revised edition of *The Rape of the Lock* (1714). Now this insertion was ingenious, brilliant, and in strict accordance with the practice of

Vida and of Boileau, both of whom it excelled. But the whole conception of it was as unlike that of Romanticism as possible.

In particular, the tendency of the classic school, in its later development, had been towards the exclusion of all but didactic and ethical considerations from treatment in verse. Pope had given great and ever-increasing emphasis to the importance of making "morals" prominent in poetry. All that he wrote after he retired to Twickenham, still a young man, in 1718, was essentially an attempt to gather together "moral wisdom" clothed in consummate language. He inculcated a moderation of feeling, a broad and general study of mankind, an acceptance of the benefits of civilisation, and a suppression of individuality. Even in so violent and so personal a work as the *Dunciad* he expends all the resources of his genius to make his anger seem moral and his indignation a public duty. This conception of the ethical responsibility of verse was universal, and even so late as 1745, long after the composition of Warton's "Enthusiast," we find Blacklock declaring, with general acceptance, that "poetical genius depends entirely on the quickness of moral feeling," and that not to "feel poetry" was the result of having "the affections and internal senses depraved by vice."

The most important innovation suggested by Joseph Warton was an outspoken assertion that this was by no means the object or the proper theme of poetry. His verses and those of his brother, the *Essay on Pope* of the elder, the critical and historical writings of the younger, may be searched in vain for the slightest evidence of moral or didactic sentiment. The instructive and ethical mannerisms of the later classicists had produced some beautiful and more accomplished verse, especially of a descriptive order, but its very essence had excluded self-revelation. Dennis, at whom Pope taught the world to laugh, but

who was in several respects a better critic than either Addison or himself, had come close to the truth sometimes, but was for ever edged away from it by the intrusion of the moral consideration. Dennis feels things æsthetically, but he blunders into ethical definition. The result was that the range of poetry was narrowed to the sphere of didactic reflection, a blunt description of scenery or objects being the only relief, since

> "who could take offence
> While pure description held the place of sense?"

To have perceived the bankruptcy of the didactic poem is Joseph Warton's most remarkable innovation. The lawlessness of the Romantic Movement, or rather its instinct for insisting that genius is a law unto itself, is first foreshadowed in "The Enthusiast," and when the history of the school comes to be written there will be a piquancy in tracing an antinomianism down from the blameless Wartons to the hedonist essays of Oscar Wilde and the frenzied anarchism of the Futurists. Not less remarkable, or less characteristic, was the revolt against the quietism of the classical school. "Avoid extremes," Pope had said, and moderation, calmness, discretion, absence of excitement had been laid down as capital injunctions. Joseph Warton's very title, "The Enthusiast," was a challenge, for "enthusiasm" was a term of reproach. He was himself a scandal to classical reserve. Mant, in the course of some excellent lines addressed to Joseph Warton, remarks

> "Thou didst seek
> Ecstatic vision by the haunted stream
> Or grove of fairy: then thy nightly ear,
> As from the wild notes of some airy harp,
> Thrilled with strange music."

The same excess of sensibility is still more clearly divulged in Joseph's own earliest verses:—

> "All beauteous Nature! by thy boundless charms
> Oppress'd, O where shall I begin thy praise,
> Where turn the ecstatic eye, *how ease my breast*
> *That pants with wild astonishment and love?*"

The Nature here addressed is a very different thing from the "Nature methodis'd" of the *Essay on Criticism.* It is not to be distinguished from the object of pantheistic worship long afterwards to be celebrated in widely differing language, but with identical devotion, by Wordsworth and Senancour, by Chateaubriand and Shelley.

Closely connected with this attitude towards physical nature is the determination to deepen the human interest in poetry, to concentrate individuality in passion. At the moment when the Wartons put forth their ideas, a change was taking place in English poetry, but not in the direction of earnest emotion. The instrument of verse had reached an extraordinary smoothness, and no instance of its capability could be more interesting than the poetry of Shenstone, with his perfect utterance of things essentially not worth saying. In the most important writers of that very exhausted moment, technical skill seems the only quality calling for remark, and when we have said all that sympathy can say for Whitehead and Akenside, the truth remains that the one is vapid, the other empty. The Wartons saw that more liberty of imagination was wanted, and that the Muse was not born to skim the meadows, in short low flights, like a wagtail. They used expressions which reveal their ambition. The poet was to be "bold, without confine," and "imagination's chartered libertine"; like a sort of Alastor, he was

> "in venturous bark to ride
> Down turbulent Delight's tempestuous tide."

These are aspirations somewhat absurdly expressed, but the aim of them is undeniable and noteworthy.

A passion for solitude always precedes the romantic obsession, and in examining the claim of the Wartons to be pioneers, we naturally look for this element. We find it abundantly in their early verses. When Thomas was only seventeen—the precocity of the brothers was remarkable—he wrote a "Pleasures of Melancholy," in which he expresses his wish to retire to "solemn glooms, congenial to the soul." In the early odes of his brother Joseph we find still more clearly indicated the intention to withdraw from the world, in order to indulge the susceptibilities of the spirit in solitary reflection. A curious air of foreshadowing the theories of Rousseau, to which I have already referred, produces an effect which is faintly indicated, but in its phantom way unique in English literature up to that date, 1740. There had been a tendency to the sepulchral in the work of several writers, in particular in the powerful and preposterous religious verse of Isaac Watts, but nothing had been suggested in the pure Romantic style.

In Joseph Warton, first, we meet with the individualist attitude to nature; a slightly hysterical exaggeration of feeling which was to be characteristic of romance; an intention of escaping from the vanity of mankind by an adventure into the wilds; a purpose of recovering primitive manners by withdrawing into primitive conditions; a passion for what we now consider the drawing-master's theory of the picturesque—the thatched cottage, the ruined castle with the moon behind it, the unfettered rivulet, the wilderness of

> "the pine-topped precipice
> Abrupt and shaggy."

There was already the fallacy, to become so irresistibly attractive to the next generation, that man in a state of civilisation was in a decayed and fallen condition, and that to achieve happiness he must wander back into a

Golden Age. Pope, in verses which had profoundly impressed two generations, had taken the opposite view, and had proved to the satisfaction of theologian and free-thinker alike that

> "God and Nature link'd the general frame,
> And bade Self-love and Social be the same."

Joseph Warton would have nothing to say to Social Love. He designed, or pretended to design, to emigrate to the backwoods of America, to live

> "With simple Indian swains, that I may hunt
> The boar and tiger through savannahs wild,
> Through fragrant deserts and through citron groves,"

indulging, without the slightest admixture of any active moral principle in social life, all the ecstasies, all the ravishing emotions, of an abandonment to excessive sensibility. The soul was to be, no longer the "little bark attendant" that "pursues the triumph and partakes the gale" in Pope's complacent *Fourth Epistle*, but an æolian harp hung in some cave of a primeval forest for the winds to rave across in solitude.

> "Happy the first of men, ere yet confin'd
> To smoky cities."

Already the voice is that of Obermann, of René, of Byron.

Another point in which the recommendations of the Wartons far outran the mediocrity of their execution was their theory of description. To comprehend the state of mind in which such pieces of stately verse as Parnell's *Hermit* or Addison's *Campaign* could be regarded as satisfactory in the setting of their descriptive ornament we must realise the aim which those poets put before them. Nothing was to be mentioned by its technical or even by its exact name; no clear picture was to be raised before the inner eye; nothing was to be left definite or vivid.

We shall make a very great mistake if we suppose this conventional vagueness to have been accidental, and a still greater if we attribute it to a lack of cleverness. When Pope referred to the sudden advent of a heavy shower at a funeral in these terms—

> "'Tis done, and nature's various charms decay;
> See gloomy clouds obscure the cheerful day!
> Now hung with pearls the dropping trees appear,
> Their faded honours scatter'd on her bier,"

it was not because he had not the skill to come into closer touch with reality, but that he did not wish to do so. It had been plainly laid down by Malherbe and confirmed by Boileau that objects should be named in general, not in precise terms. We are really, in studying the descriptive parts of the Classicist poets, very close to the theories of Mallarmé and the Symbolists which occupied us twenty years ago. The object of the poet was not to present a vivid picture to the reader, but to start in him a state of mind.

We must recollect, in considering what may seem to us the sterility and stiffness of the English poets from 1660 to 1740, that they were addressing a public which, after the irregular violence and anarchical fancy of the middle of the seventeenth century, had begun to yearn for regularity, common sense, and a moderation in relative variety. The simplest ideas should be chosen, and should depend for their poetical effect, not upon a redundant and gorgeous ornament, but solely upon elegance of language. There were certain references, certain channels of imagery, which were purely symbolical, and these could be defended only on the understanding that they produced on the mind of the reader, instantly and without effort, the illustrative effect required. For instance, with all these neo-classicists, the mythological allusions, which seem vapid and ridiculous to us, were simplified metaphor and a question

of style. In short, it rested the jaded imagination of Europe, after Gongora and Marini, Donne and D'Aubigné, to sink back on a poetry which had taken a vow to remain scrupulous, elegant, and selected.

But the imagination of England was now beginning to be impatient of these bonds. It was getting tired of a rest-cure so prolonged. It asked for more colour, more exuberance, more precise reproduction of visual impressions. Thomson had summed up and had carried to greater lengths the instinct for scenery which had never entirely died out in England, except for a few years after the Restoration. It was left to Joseph Warton, however, to rebel against the whole mode in which the cabbage of landscape was shredded into the classical *pot-au-feu*. He proposes that, in place of the mention of "Idalia's groves," when Windsor Forest is intended, and of milk-white bulls sacrificed to Phoebus at Twickenham, the poets should boldly mention in their verses English "places remarkably romantic, the supposed habitation of druids, bards, and wizards," and he vigorously recommends Theocritus as a model far superior to Pope because of the greater exactitude of his references to objects, and because of his more realistic appeal to the imagination. Description, Warton says, should be uncommon, exact, not symbolic and allusive, but referring to objects clearly, by their real names. He very pertinently points out that Pope, in a set piece of extraordinary cleverness—which was to be read, more than half a century later, even by Wordsworth, with pleasure—confines himself to rural beauty in general, and declines to call up before us the peculiar beauties which characterise the Forest of Windsor.

A specimen of Joseph Warton's descriptive poetry may here be given, not for its great inherent excellence, but because it shows his resistance to the obstinate classic mannerism :—

"Tell me the path, sweet wanderer, tell,
To thy unknown sequestered cell,
Where woodbines cluster round the door,
Where shells and moss o'erlay the floor,
And on whose top an hawthorn blows,
Amid whose thickly-woven boughs
Some nightingale still builds her nest,
Each evening warbling thee to rest;
Then lay me by the haunted stream,
Rapt in some wild poetic dream,
In converse while methinks I rove
With Spenser through a fairy grove."

To show how identical were the methods of the two brothers we may compare the foregoing lines with the following from Thomas Warton's "Ode on the Approach of Summer" (published when he was twenty-five, and possibly written much earlier) :—

"His wattled cotes the shepherd plaits;
Beneath her elm the milkmaid chats;
The woodman, speeding home, awhile
Rests him at a shady stile;
Nor wants there fragrance to dispense
Refreshment o'er my soothèd sense;
Nor tangled woodbine's balmy bloom,
Nor grass besprent to breathe perfume,
Nor lurking wild-thyme's spicy sweet
To bathe in dew my roving feet;
Nor wants there note of Philomel,
Nor sound of distant-tinkling bell,
Nor lowings faint of herds remote,
Nor mastiff's bark from bosom'd cot;
Rustle the breezes lightly borne
O'er deep embattled ears of corn;
Round ancient elms, with humming noise,
Full loud the chafer-swarms rejoice."

The youthful poet is in full revolt against the law which forbade his elders to mention objects by their plain names.

Here we notice at once, as we do in similar early effusions of both the Wartons, the direct influence of Milton's lyrics. To examine the effect of the rediscovery of Milton upon the poets of the middle of the eighteenth century would lead us too far from the special subject of our inquiry

to-day. But it must be pointed out that *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* had been entirely neglected, and practically unknown, until a date long after the rehabilitation of *Paradise Lost.* The date at which Handel set them to music, 1740, is that of the revived or discovered popularity of these two odes, which then began to be fashionable, at all events among the younger poets. They formed a bridge, which linked the new writers with the early seventeenth century across the Augustan Age, and their versification as well as their method of description were as much resisted by the traditional Classicists as they were attractive, and directly preferred above those of Pope, by the innovators. Joseph Warton, who attributed many of the faults of modern lyrical writing to the example of Petrarch, sets Milton vehemently over against him, and entreats the poets "to accustom themselves to contemplate fully every object before they attempt to describe it." They were above all to avoid nauseous repetition of commonplaces, and what Warton excellently calls "hereditary images."

We must not, however, confine ourselves to a consideration of "The Enthusiast" of 1740 and the preface to the *Odes* of 1746. Certain of the expressions, indeed, already quoted, are taken from the two very important critical works which the brothers published while they were still quite young. We must now turn particularly to Joseph Warton's *Essay on the Genius of Pope* of 1756, and to Thomas Warton's *Observations on the Faerie Queene* of 1754. Of these the former is the more important and the more readable. Joseph's *Essay on Pope* is an extraordinary production for the time at which it was produced. Let me suggest that we make a great mistake in treating the works of old writers as if they had been always written by old men. I am trying to present the Wartons to you as I see them, and that is as enthusiastic youths, flushed with a kind of intellectual felicity, and dreaming how

poetry shall be produced as musicians make airs, by inspiration, not by rote. Remember that when they took their walks in the forest at Hackwood, the whole world of culture held that true genius had expired with Pope, and this view was oracularly supported by Warburton and such-like pundits. I have already pointed out to you that Pope was divided from them not more than Swinburne is divided from us. Conceive two very young men to-day putting their heads together to devise a scheme of poetry which should entirely supersede that, not of Swinburne only, but of Tennyson and Browning also, and you have the original attitude of the Wartons.

It is difficult for us to realise what was the nature of the spell which Pope threw over the literary conscience of the eighteenth century. Forty years after the revolt of the Wartons, Pope was still looked upon by the average critic as "the most distinguished and the most interesting Poet of the nation." Joseph Warton was styled "the Winton Pedant" for suggesting that Pope paid too dearly for his lucidity and lightness, and for desiring to break up with odes and sonnets the oratorical mould which gave a monotony of form to early eighteenth-century verse. His *Essay on Pope*, though written with such studied moderation that we may, in a hasty reading, regard it almost as a eulogy, was so shocking to the prejudices of the hour that it was received with universal disfavour, and twenty-six years passed before the author had the moral courage to pursue it to a conclusion. He dedicated it to Young, who, alone of the Augustans, had admitted that charm in a melancholy solitude, that beauty of funereal and mysterious effects, which was to be one of the leading characteristics of the Romantic School, and who dimly perceived the sublime and the pathetic to be "the two chief nerves of all genuine poetry."

Warton's *Essay on the Genius of Pope* is not well arranged,

and, in spite of eloquent passages, as literature it does not offer much attraction to the reader of the present day. But its thesis is one which is very interesting to us, and was of startling novelty when it was advanced. In the author's own words it was to prove that "a clear head and acute understanding are not sufficient, alone, to make a poet." The custom of critics had been to say that, when supported by a profound moral sense, they *were* sufficient, and Pope was pointed to as the overwhelming exemplar of the truth of this statement. Pope had taken this position himself and, as life advanced, the well of pure poetry in him had dried up more and more completely, until it had turned into a sort of fountain of bright, dry sand, of which the *Epilogue to the Satires*, written in 1738, when Joseph Warton was sixteen years of age, may be taken as the extreme instance. The young author of the *Essay* made the earliest attempt which any one made to put Pope in his right place, that is to say, not to deny him genius or to deprecate the extreme pleasure readers found in his writings, but to insist that, by the very nature of his gifts, his was genius of a lower rank than that of the supreme poets, with whom he was commonly paralleled when he was not preferred to them all.

Warton admitted but three supreme English poets—Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton—and he vehemently insisted that moral, didactic and panegyrical poetry could never rise above the second class in importance. To assert this was not merely to offend against the undoubted supremacy of Pope, but it was to flout the claims of all those others to whom the age gave allegiance. Joseph Warton does not shrink from doing this, and he gives reason for abating the claims of all the classic favourites—Cowley, Waller, Dryden, Addison. When it was advanced against him that he showed arrogance in placing his opinion against that of a multitude of highly trained judges, he replied

that a real "relish and enjoyment of poetry" is a rare quality, and "a creative and glowing imagination" possessed by few. When the *dicta* of Boileau were quoted against him, he repudiated their authority with scarcely less vivacity than Keats was to display half a century later.

Joseph Warton's *Essay* wanders about, and we may acknowledge ourselves more interested in the mental attitude which it displays than in the detail of its criticism. The author insists, with much force, on the value of a grandiose melancholy and a romantic horror in creating a poetical impression, and he allows himself to deplore that Pope was so ready to forget that "wit and satire are transitory and perishable, but nature and passion are eternal." We need not then be surprised when Joseph Warton boldly protests that no other part of the writings of Pope approaches *Eloisa to Abelard* in the quality of being "truly poetical." He was perhaps led to some indulgence by the fact that this is the one composition in which Pope appears to be indebted to Milton's lyrics, but there was much more than that. So far as I am aware, *Eloisa to Abelard* had never taken a high place with Pope's extreme admirers, doubtless because of its obsession with horror and passion. But when we read how

> "o'er the twilight groves and dusky caves,
> Long-sounding aisles, and intermingled graves,
> Black melancholy sits, and round her throws
> A death-like silence and a dead repose,"

and still more when we reflect on the perpetual and powerful appeals which the poem makes to emotion unbridled by moral scruple, we have no difficulty in perceiving why *Eloisa to Abelard* exercised so powerful an attraction on Joseph Warton. The absence of ethical reservation, the licence, in short, was highly attractive to him, and he rejoiced in finding Pope, even so slightly, even so briefly,

faithless to his formula. It is worth while to note that Joseph Warton's sympathy with the sentimental malady of the soul which lies at the core of Romanticism permitted him to be, perhaps, the first man since the Renaissance who recognised with pleasure the tumult of the *Atys* of Catullus and the febrile sensibility of Sappho.

Both brothers urged that more liberty of imagination was what English poetry needed; that the lark had been shut up long enough in a gilded cage. We have a glimpse of Thomas Warton introducing the study of the great Italian classics into Oxford at a very early age, and we see him crowned with laurel in the common-room of Trinity College at the age of nineteen. This was in the year before the death of Thomson. No doubt he was already preparing his *Observations on the Faerie Queene*, which came out a little later. He was Professor of Poetry at Oxford before he was thirty. Both the brothers took great pleasure in the study of Spenser, and they both desired that the supernatural "machinery" of Ariosto, in common with the romance of *The Faerie Queene*, should be combined with a description of nature as untrimmed and unshackled as possible. Thomas Warton, in his remarkable Oxford poem, "The Painted Window," describes himself as

> "A faithless truant to the classic page,
> Long have I loved to catch the simple chime
> Of minstrel-harps, and spell the fabling rhyme,"

and again he says:—

> "I soothed my sorrows with the dulcet lore
> Which Fancy fabled in her elfin age,"

that is to say when Spenser was writing "upon Mulla's shore."

After all this, the *Observations on the Faerie Queene* of 1754 is rather disappointing. Thomas was probably much

more learned as a historian of literature than Joseph, but he is not so interesting a critic. Still, he followed exactly the same lines, with the addition of a wider knowledge. His reading is seen to be already immense, but he is tempted to make too tiresome a display of it. Nevertheless, he is as thorough as his brother in his insistence upon qualities which we have now learned to call Romantic, and he praises all sorts of old books which no one then spoke of with respect. He warmly recommends the *Morte d'Arthur*, which had probably not found a single admirer since 1634. When he mentions Ben Jonson, it is characteristic that it is to quote the line about "the charmèd boats and the enchanted wharves," which sounds like a foretaste of Keats's "magic casements opening on the foam of perilous seas." The public of Warton's day had relegated all tales about knights, dragons, and enchanters to the nursery, and Thomas Warton shows courage in insisting that they are excellent subjects for serious and adult literature. He certainly would have thoroughly enjoyed the romances of Mrs. Radcliffe, whom a later generation was to welcome as "the mighty magician bred and nourished by the Muses in their sacred solitary caverns, amid the paler shrines of Gothic superstition," and he despised the neo-classic make-believe of grottoes. He says, with firmness, that epic poetry—and he is thinking of Ariosto, Tasso, and Spenser—would never have been written if the critical judgments current in 1754 had been in vogue.

Thomas Warton closely studied the influence of Ariosto on Spenser, and no other part of the *Observations* is so valuable as the pages in which those two poets are contrasted. He remarked the polish of the former poet with approval, and he did not shrink from what is violently fantastic in the plot of the *Orlando Furioso*. On that point he says, "The present age is too fond of manner'd

poetry to relish fiction and fable," but perhaps he did not observe that although there is no chivalry in *The Schoolmistress*, that accomplished piece was the indirect outcome of the Italian mock-heroic epics. The Classicists had fought for lucidity and common sense, whereas to be tenebrous and vague was a merit with the precursors of Romanticism, or at least, without unfairness, we may say that they asserted the power of imagination to make what was mysterious, and even fabulous, true to the fancy. This tendency, which we first perceive in the Wartons, rapidly developed, and it led to the blind enthusiasm with which the vapourings of Macpherson were presently received. The earliest specimens of *Ossian* were revealed to a too-credulous public in 1760, but I find no evidence of any welcome which they received from either Joseph or Thomas. The brothers personally preferred a livelier and more dramatic presentation, and when Dr. Johnson laughed at Collins because "he loved fairies, genii, giants, and monsters," the laugh was really at the expense of his school-fellow Joseph Warton, to whom Collins seems to have owed his boyish inspiration, although he was by a few months the senior.

Johnson was a resolute opponent of the principles of the Wartons, though he held Thomas, at least, in great personal regard. He objected to the brothers that they "affected the obsolete when it was not worthy of revival," and his *boutade* about their own poetry is well known :—

"Phrase that time hath flung away,
Uncouth words in disarray,
Trick'd in antique ruff and bonnet,
Ode and elegy and sonnet."

This conservatism was not peculiar to Johnson; there was a general tendency to resist the reintroduction into language and literature of words and forms which had been allowed to disappear. A generation later, a careful and thoughtful

grammarian like Gilpin was in danger of being dismissed as "a cockscomb" because he tried to enlarge our national vocabulary. The Wartons were accused of searching old libraries for glossaries of disused terms in order to display them in their own writings. This was not quite an idle charge; it is to be noted as one of the symptoms of active Romanticism that it is always dissatisfied with the diction commonly in use, and desires to dazzle and mystify by embroidering its texture with archaic and far-fetched words. Chatterton, who was not yet born when the Wartons formed and expressed their ideas, was to carry this instinct to a preposterous extreme in his Rowley forgeries, where he tries to obtain a mediæval colouring by transferring words out of an imperfect Anglo-Saxon lexicon, often without discerning the actual meaning of those words.

Both the Wartons continued, in successive disquisitions, to repeat their definition of poetry, but it cannot be said that either of them advanced. So far as Joseph is concerned, he seems early to have succumbed to the pressure of the age and of his surroundings. In 1766 he became head master of Winchester, and settled down after curious escapades which had nothing poetical about them. In the head master of a great public school, reiterated murmurs against bondage to the Classical Greeks and Romans would have been unbecoming, and Joseph Warton was a man of the world. Perhaps in the solitude of his study he murmured, as disenchanted enthusiasts often murmur, "Say, are the days of blest delusion fled?" Yet traces of the old fire were occasionally manifest; still each brother woke up at intervals to censure the criticism of those who did not see that imagination must be paramount in poetry, and who made the mistake of putting "discernment" in the place of "enthusiasm." I hardly know why it gives me great pleasure to learn that "the manner in which the Rev. Mr. Joseph Warton read the Communion Service was

remarkably awful," but it must be as an evidence that he carried a "Gothick" manner into daily life.

The spirit of pedantry, so amicably mocked by the Wartons, took its revenge upon Thomas in the form of a barren demon named Joseph Ritson, who addressed to him in 1782 what he aptly called *A Familiar Letter*. There is hardly a more ferocious pamphlet in the whole history of literature. Ritson, who had the virulence of a hornet and the same insect's inability to produce honey of his own, was considered by the reactionaries to have "punched Tom Warton's historick body full of deadly holes." But his strictures were not really important. In marshalling some thousands of facts, Warton had made perhaps a couple of dozen mistakes, and Ritson advances these with a reiteration and a violence worthy of a maniac. Moreover, and this is the fate of angry pedants, he himself is often found to be as dustily incorrect as Warton when examined by modern lights. Ritson, who accuses Warton of "never having consulted or even seen" the books he quotes from, and of intentionally swindling the public, was in private life a vegetarian who is said to have turned his orphan nephew on to the streets because he caught him eating a mutton-chop. Ritson flung his arrows far and wide, for he called Dr. Samuel Johnson himself "that great luminary, or rather dark lantern of literature."

If we turn over Ritson's distasteful pages, it is only to obtain from them further proof of the perception of Warton's Romanticism by an adversary whom hatred made perspicacious. Ritson abuses the *History of English Poetry* for presuming to have "rescued from oblivion irregular beauties" of which no one desired to be reminded. He charges Warton with recommending the poetry of "our Pagan fathers" because it is untouched by Christianity, and of saying that "religion and poetry are incompatible." He accuses him of "constantly busying himself with pas-

sages which he does not understand, because they appeal to his ear or his fancy." "Old poetry," Ritson says to Warton, "is the same thing to you, sense or nonsense." He dwells on Warton's marked attraction to whatever is prodigious and impossible. The manner in which these accusations are made is insolent and detestable; but Ritson had penetration, and without knowing what he reached, in some of these diatribes he pierced to the heart of the Romanticist fallacy.

It is needful that I should bring these observations to a close. I hope I have made good my claim that it was the Wartons who introduced into the discussion of English poetry the principle of Romanticism. To use a metaphor of which both of them would have approved, that principle was to them like the mystical bowl of ichor, the *ampolla*, which Astolpho was expected to bring down from heaven in the *Orlando Furioso*. If I have given you an exaggerated idea of the extent to which they foresaw the momentous change in English literature, I am to blame. No doubt by extracting a great number of slight and minute remarks, and by putting them together, the critic may produce an effect which is too emphatic. But you will be on your guard against such misdirection. It is enough for me if you will admit the priority of the intuition of the brothers, and I do not think that it can be contested.

Thomas Warton said, "I have rejected the ideas of men who are the most distinguished ornaments" of the history of English poetry, and he appealed against a "mechanical" attitude towards the art of poetry. The brothers did more in rebelling against the Classic formulas than in starting new poetic methods. There was an absence in them of "the pomps and prodigality" of genius of which Gray spoke in a noble stanza. They began with enthusiasm, but they had no native richness of expression, no store of energy. It needed a nature as

unfettered as Blake's, as wide as Wordsworth's, as opulent as Keats's, to push the Romantic attack on to victory. The instinct for ecstasy, ravishment, the caprices and vagaries of emotion, was there; there was present in both brothers, while they were still young, an extreme sensibility. The instinct was present in them, but the sacred fire died out in the vacuum of their social experience, and neither Warton had the energy to build up a style in prose or verse. They struggled for a little while, and then they succumbed to the worn verbiage of their age, from which it is sometimes no light task to disengage their thought. In their later days they made some sad defections, and I can never forgive Thomas Warton for arriving at Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* and failing to observe its beauties. We are told that as Camden Professor he "suffered the rostrum to grow cold," and he was an ineffective poet laureate. His brother Joseph felt the necessity or the craving for lyrical expression, without attaining more than a muffled and a second-rate effect.

All this has to be sadly admitted. But the fact remains that between 1740 and 1750, while even the voice of Rousseau had not begun to make itself heard in Europe, the Wartons had discovered the fallacy of the poetic theories admitted in their day, and had formed some faint conception of a mode of escape from them. The Abbé Du Bos had laid down in his celebrated *Réflexions* (1719) that the poet's art consists of making a general moral representation of incidents and scenes, and embellishing it with elegant images. This had been accepted and acted upon by Pope and by all his followers. To have been the first to perceive the inadequacy and the falsity of a law which excluded all imagination, all enthusiasm, and all mystery, is to demand respectful attention from the historian of Romanticism, and this attention is due to Joseph and Thomas Warton.

THE CHARM OF STERNE

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It is exactly two hundred years to-night since there was born, at Clonmel, in Ireland, a son to a subaltern in an English regiment just home from the Low Countries. "My birthday," Laurence Sterne tells us, "was ominous to my poor father, who was, the day after our arrival, with many other brave officers, broke and sent adrift into the wide world with a wife and two children." The life of the new baby was one of perpetual hurry and scurry; his mother, who had been an old campaigner, daughter of what her son calls "a noted suttler" called Nuttle, had been the widow of a soldier before she married Roger Sterne. In the extraordinary fashion of the army of those days, the regiment was hurried from place to place—as was that of the father of the infant Borrow a century later—and with it hastened the unhappy Mrs. Sterne, for ever bearing and for ever losing children, "most rueful journeys," marked by a long succession of little tombstones left behind. Finally, at Gibraltar, the weary father, pugnacious to the last, picked a quarrel about a goose and was pinked through the body, surviving in a thoroughly damaged condition, to die, poor exhausted pilgrim of Bellona, in barracks in Jamaica.

It would be difficult to imagine a childhood better calculated than this to encourage pathos in a humorist and fun in a sentimentalist. His account, in his brief auto-

[1] Address delivered to the Authors' Club, November 24th, 1913.

biography, of the appearance and disappearance of his hapless brothers and sisters is a proof of how early life appealed to Laurence Sterne in the dappled colours of an April day. We read there of how at Wicklow "we lost poor Joram, a pretty boy"; how "Anne, that pretty blossom, fell in the barracks of Dublin"; how little Devijehar was "left behind" in Carrickfergus. We know not whether to sob or to giggle, so tragic is the rapid catalogue of dying babies, so ridiculous are their names and fates. Here, then, I think, we have revealed to us the prime characteristic of Sterne, from which all his other characteristics branch away, for evil or for good. As no other writer since Shakespeare, and in a different and perhaps more intimate way than even Shakespeare, he possessed the key of those tears that succeed the hysteria of laughter, and of that laughter which succeeds the passion of tears. From early childhood, and all through youth and manhood, he had been collecting observations upon human nature in these rapidly alternating moods.

He observed it in its frailty, but being exquisitely frail himself, he was no satirist. A breath of real satire would blow down the whole delicate fabric of *Tristram Shandy* and the *Sentimental Journey*. Sterne pokes fun at people and things; he banters the extravagance of private humour; but it is always with a consciousness that he is himself more extravagant than any one. If we compare him for a moment with Richardson, who buttonholes the reader in a sermon; or with Smollett, who snarls and bites like an angry beast; we feel at once that Sterne could not breathe in the stuffiness of the one or in the tempest of the other. Sympathy is the breath of his nostrils, and he cannot exist except in a tender, merry relation with his readers. His own ideal, surely, is that which he attributed to the fantastic and gentle Yorick, who never could enter a village, but he caught the attention of old and young. "Labour stood

still as he passed; the bucket hung suspended in the middle of the well; the spinning-wheel forgot its round, even chuck-farthing and shuffle-cap themselves stood gaping till he had got out of sight." Like Yorick, Sterne loved a jest in his heart.

There are, it seems to me, two distinct strains in the intellectual development of Sterne, and I should like to dwell upon them for a moment, because I think a lack of recognition of them has been apt to darken critical counsel in the consideration of his writings. You will remember that he was forty-six years of age before he took up the business of literature seriously. Until that time he had been a country parson in Yorkshire, carrying his body, that "cadaverous bale of goods," from Sutton to Stillington, and from Stillington to Skelton. He had spent his life in riding, shooting, preaching, joking, and philandering in company, and after a fashion, most truly reprehensible from a clerical point of view, yet admirably fitted to prepare such an artist for his destined labours as a painter of the oddities of average Englishmen. But by the side of this indolent search after the enjoyment of the hour, Sterne cultivated a formidable species of literature in which he had so few competitors that, in after years, his indolence prompted him to plagiarise freely from sources which, surely, no human being would discover. He steeped himself in the cumbrous learning of those writers of the Renaissance in whom congested Latin is found tottering into colloquial French. He studied Rabelais perhaps more deeply than any other Englishman of his time, and certainly Beroalde de Verville, Bruscambille, and other absurdities of the sixteenth century were familiar to him and to him alone in England.

Hence, when Sterne began to write, there were two streams flowing in his brain, and these were, like everything else about him, inconsistent with one another. The faithful

tender colour of modern life competed with the preposterous oddity of burlesque erudition. When he started the annals of Tristram Shandy, the Rabelais vein was in the ascendant, and there is plenty of evidence that it vastly dazzled and entertained readers of that day. But it no longer entertains us very much, and it is the source of considerable injustice done by modern criticism to the real merits of Sterne. When so acute a writer as Bagehot condemns much of *Tristram Shandy* as "a sort of antediluvian fun, in which uncouth saurian jokes play idly in an unintelligible world," he hits the nail on the head of why so many readers nowadays turn with impatience from that work. But they should persevere, for Sterne himself saw his error, and gradually dropped the "uncouth saurian jokes" which he had filched out of Burton and Beroalde, relying more and more exclusively on his own rich store of observations taken directly from human nature. In the adorable seventh volume of *Tristram*, and in *The Sentimental Journey*, there is nothing left of Rabelais except a certain rambling artifice of style.

The death of Sterne, at the age of fifty-four, is one of those events which must be continually regretted, because to the very end of his life he was growing in ease and ripeness, was discovering more perfect modes of self-expression, and was purging himself of his compromising intellectual frailties. It is true that from the very first his excellences were patent. The portrait of my Uncle Toby, which Hazlitt truly said is "one of the finest compliments ever paid to human nature," occurs, or rather begins, in the second volume of *Tristram Shandy*. But the marvellous portraits which the early sections of that work contain are to some extent obscured, or diluted, by the author's determination to gain piquancy by applying old methods to new subjects. Frankly, much as I love Sterne, I find Kunastrockius and Lithopaedus a bore. I suspect they have

driven more than one modern reader away from the enjoyment of *Tristram Shandy*.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century a leading Dissenting minister, the Rev. Joseph Fawcett, said in answer to a question: "Do I *like* Sterne? Yes, to be sure, I should deserve to be hanged if I didn't!" That was the attitude of thoughtful and scrupulous people of cultivation more than one hundred years ago. But it was their attitude only on some occasions. There is no record of the fact, but I am ready to believe that Mr. Fawcett may, with equal sincerity, have said that Sterne was a godless wretch. We know that Bishop Warburton presented him with a purse of gold, in rapturous appreciation of his talents, and then in a different mood described him as "an irrevocable scoundrel." No one else has ever flourished in literature who has combined such alternating powers of attraction and repulsion. We like Sterne extremely at one moment, and we dislike him no less violently at another. He is attar of roses to-day and asafœtida to-morrow, and it is not by any means easy to define the elements which draw us towards him and away from him. Like Yorick, he had "a wild way of talking," and he wrote impetuously and impudently "in the naked temper which a merry heart discovered." As he "seldom shunned occasions of saying what came uppermost, and without much ceremony, he had but too many temptations in life of scattering his wit and his humour, his gibes and his jests, about him."

So that even if he had been merely Yorick, Sterne would have had manifold opportunities of giving offence and causing scandal. But he was not only a humorist with "a thousand little sceptical notions to defend," but he was a sentimentalist as well. These two characteristics he was constantly mingling, or trying to mingle, since sentimentality and humour are in reality like oil and wine. He would exasperate his readers by throwing his wig in their faces

at the moment when they were weeping, or put them out of countenance by ending a farcical story on a melancholy note. A great majority of Englishmen like to be quite sure of the tone of what they read; they wish an author to be straightforward; they dread irony and they loathe impishness. Now Sterne is the most impish of all imaginative writers. He is what our grandmothers, in describing the vagaries of the nursery, used to call "a limb of Satan." Tristram Shandy, in his light-hearted way, declared that "there's not so much difference between good and evil as the world is apt to imagine." No doubt that is so, but the world does not like its preachers to play fast and loose with moral definitions.

The famous sensibility of Sterne was a reaction against the seriousness, the ponderosity, of previous prose literature in England. We talk of the heaviness of the eighteenth century, but the periods of even such masters of solid rhetoric as Johnson and Gibbon are light as thistledown in comparison with the academic prose of the seventeenth century. Before the eighteenth century is called lumbering, let us set a page of Hume against a page of Hobbes, or a passage out of Berkeley by a passage out of Selden. Common justice is seldom done to the steady clarification of English prose between 1660 and 1750, but it was kept within formal lines until the sensitive recklessness of Sterne broke up the mould, and gave it the flying forms of a cloud or a wave. He owed this beautiful inspiration to what Nietzsche calls his "squirrel-soul," which leaped from bough to bough, and responded without a trace of conventional restraint to every gust of emotion. Well might Goethe be inspired to declare that Sterne was the most emancipated spirit of his century.

His very emancipation gives us the reason why Sterne's admirers nowadays are often divided in their allegiance to him. A frequent part of his humour deals very flippantly

with subjects that are what we have been taught to consider indelicate or objectionable. It is worse than useless to try to explain this foible of his away, because he was aware of it and did it on purpose. He said that " nothing but the more gross and carnal parts of a composition will go down." His indecency was objected to in his own age, but not with any excluding severity. And I would like to call your attention to the curious conventionality of our views on this subject. Human nature does not change, but it changes its modes of expression. In the eighteenth century very grave people, even bishops, allowed themselves, in their relaxed moments, great licence in jesting. Yet they would have been scandalised by the tragic treatment of sex by our more audacious novelists of to-day. We are still interested in these matters, but we have agreed not to joke about them. I read the other day a dictum of one of those young gentlemen who act as our moral policemen: he prophesied that a jest on a sexual subject would, in twenty years, be not merely reprehensible, as it is now, but unintelligible. Very proper, no doubt, only do not let us call this morality, it is only a change of habits.

Sterne is not suited to readers who are disheartened at irrelevancy. It is part of his charm, and it is at the same time his most whimsical habit, never to proceed with his story when you expect him to do so, and to be reminded by his own divagations of delightful side-issues which lead you, entranced, whither you had no intention of going. He did not merely not shun occasions of being irrelevant, but he sought them out and eagerly cultivated them. Remember that a whole chapter of *Tristram* is devoted to the *attitude* of Corporal Trim as he prepared himself to read the Sermon. Sterne kept a stable of prancing, plump little hobby-horses, and he trotted them out upon every occasion. But this is what makes his books the best conversational writing in the English language. He writes

for all the world exactly as though he were talking at his ease, and we listen enchanted to the careless, frolicking, idle, penetrating speaker who builds up for us so nonchalantly, with persistent but unobtrusive touch upon touch, the immortal figures of Mr. Shandy, my Uncle Toby, Trim, Yorick, the Widow Wadman, and so many more.

This, I am inclined to think, in drawing this brief sketch to an end, is Sterne's main interest for ourselves. He broke up the rhetorical manner of composition, or, rather, he produced an alternative manner which was gradually accepted and is in partial favour still. I would ask you to read for yourselves the scene of the ass who blocked the way for Tristram at Lyons, and to consider how completely new that method of describing, of facing a literary problem, was in 1765. I speak here to an audience of experts, to a company of authors who are accustomed to a close consideration of the workmanship of their *métier*. I ask them where, at all events in English, anything like that scene had been found before the days of Sterne. Since those days we have never been without it.

To trace the Shandean influence down English literature for the last century and a half would take me much too long for your patience. In Dickens, in Carlyle, even in Ruskin, the Shandean element is often present and not rarely predominant. None of those great men would have expressed himself exactly as he does but for Laurence Sterne. And coming down to our own time, I see the influence of Sterne everywhere. The pathos of Sir James Barrie is intimately related to that of the creator of Uncle Toby and Maria of Moulines, while I am not sure that of all the books which Stevenson read it was not the *Sentimental Journey* which made the deepest impression upon him.

THE CENTENARY OF EDGAR ALLAN POE

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In the announcements of the approaching celebration of the centenary of Poe in this country, the fact of his having been a poet was concealed. Perhaps his admirers hoped that it might be overlooked, as without importance, or condoned as the result of bad habits. At all events, the statement that the revels on that occasion would be conducted by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was quite enough to prove that it was the prose writer of "The Black Cat" and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and not the verse writer of "Ulalume" and "Annabel Lee" who would be the centre of attention. On that side of Poe's genius, therefore, although it is illustrated by such masterpieces of sullen beauty as "The Fall of the House of Usher" and such triumphs of fantastic ingenuity as "The Gold Bug," I feel it needless to dwell here, the more as I think the importance of these tales very slight by the side of that of the best poems. Edgar Poe was, in my opinion, one of the most significant poetic artists of a century rich in poetic artists, and I hold it to be for this reason, and not because he wrote thrilling "detective" stories, that he deserves persistent commemoration.

The dominance of Poe as an important poetic factor of the nineteenth century has not been easily or universally admitted, and it is only natural to examine both the phenomena and the causes of the objections so persistently brought against it. In the first instance, if the fame of

Browning and Tennyson advanced slowly, it advanced firmly, and it was encouraged from the beginning by the experts, by the cultivated minority. Poe, on the other hand, was challenged, and his credentials were grudgingly inspected, by those who represented the finest culture of his own country, and the carpings of New England criticism are not quite silent yet. When he died, in 1849, the tribunal of American letters sat at Cambridge, in the neighbourhood of Boston, and it was ill-prepared to believe that anything poetical could deserve salvation if it proceeded from a place outside the magic circle. Edgar Poe, the son of Irish strolling players, called "The Virginia Comedians," settled in the South and was educated in England. By an odd coincidence, it now appears that he actually was a native, as it were by accident, of Boston itself. In the words of the Psalmist, "Lo! there was he born!" This Gentile poet, such was the then state of American literature, could not arrive on earth elsewhere than in the Jerusalem of Massachusetts. But that concession was not known to the high priests, the Lowells, the Holmeses, the Nortons, to whom Poe seemed a piratical intruder from Javan or Gadire.

Nothing is so discouraging to a young poet of originality as to find himself isolated. Everything new is regarded with suspicion and dislike by the general world of readers, and usually by the leaders of criticism as well. Yet the daring prophet feels supported if he has but his Aaron and his Hur. In the generation that immediately preceded Poe, Wordsworth and Coleridge had been derided, but they had enjoyed the emphatic approbation of one another and of Southey. Shelley had been a pariah of letters, yet he was cordially believed in by Byron and by Peacock. Even Keats could shrink from the mud-storms of the Scotch reviewers behind the confident zeal of Leigh Hunt and Reynolds. At a still later moment Rossetti and Morris

would shelter themselves securely, and even serenely, from the obloquy of criticism, within a slender peel-tower of the praise of friends. In all these cases there could be set against the stupidity of the world at large the comfortable cleverness of a few strong persons of taste, founded, as all good taste must be, upon principles. The poet could pride himself on his eclecticism, on his recognition within, as Keats said, "a little clan." But Poe's misfortune was to have no clan of his own, and to be rejected by precisely those persons who represented, and on the whole justly represented, good taste in America.

His behaviour in this predicament was what might have been expected from a man whose genius was more considerable than his judgment or his manners. He tried, at first, to conciliate the New England authorities, and he flattered not merely the greater planets but some of the very little stars. He danced, a plaintive Salome, before Christopher P. Cranch and Nathaniel P. Willis. When he found that his blandishments were of no avail, he turned savage, and tried to prove that he did not care, by being rude to Bryant and Longfellow. He called the whole solemn Sanhedrim a college of Frog-pondian professors. Thus, of course, he closed upon himself the doors of mercy, since the central aim and object of the excellent men who at that time ruled American literature was to prove that, in what this impertinent young man from Virginia called the Frog Pond, the United States possessed its Athens and its Weimar, its home of impeccable distinction. Indeed, but for the recognition of Europe, which began to flow in richly just as Poe ceased to be able to enjoy it, the prestige of this remarkable poet might have been successfully annihilated.

Nor was it only the synod of Boston wits who issued the edict that he should be ignored, but in England also many good judges of literature, especially those who belonged to the intellectual rather than the artistic class, could not

away with him. I recollect hearing Leslie Stephen say, now nearly thirty years ago, that to employ strong terms of praise for Poe was "simply preposterous." And one whom I admire so implicitly that I will not mention his name in a context which is not favourable to his judgment, wrote (in his haste) of Poe's "singularly valueless verses."

This opposition, modified, it is true, by the very different attitude adopted by Tennyson and most subsequent English poets, as well as by Baudelaire, Mallarmé and the whole younger school in France, was obstinately preserved, and has not wholly subsided. It would be a tactical mistake for those who wish to insist on Poe's supremacy in his own line to ignore the serious resistance which has been made to it. In the canonisation-trial of this whimsical saint, the Devil's advocates, it may be confessed, are many, and their objections are imposing. It is possible that local pique and a horror of certain crude surroundings may have had something to do with the original want of recognition in New England, but such sources of prejudice would be ephemeral. There remained, and has continued to remain, in the very essence of Poe's poetry, something which a great many sincere and penetrating lovers of verse cannot endure to admit as a dominant characteristic of the art.

To recognise the nature of this quality is to take the first step towards discovering the actual essence of Pope's genius. His detractors have said that his verses are "singularly valueless." It is therefore necessary to define what it is they mean by "value." If they mean an inculcation, in beautiful forms, of moral truth; if they mean a succession of ideas, clothed in exalted and yet definite language; if they are thinking of what stirs the heart in reading parts of *Hamlet* and *Comus*, of what keeps the pulse vibrating after the "Ode to Duty" has been recited; then the verses of Poe are indeed without

value. A poet less gnomic than Poe, one from whom less, as they say in the suburbs, "can be learned," is scarcely to be found in the whole range of literature. His lack of curiosity about moral ideas is so complete that evil moves him no more than good. There have been writers of eccentric or perverse morality who have been so much irritated by the preaching of virtue that they have lent their genius to the recommendation of vice. This inversion of moral fervour is perhaps the source of most that is vaguely called "immoral" in imaginative literature. But Edgar Poe is as innocent of immorality as he is of morality. No more innocuous flowers than his are grown through the length and breadth of Parnassus. There is hardly a phrase in his collected writings which has a bearing upon any ethical question, and those who look for what Wordsworth called "chains of valuable thoughts" must go elsewhere.

In 1840 they might, in New England, go to Bryant, to Emerson, to Hawthorne; and it is more than excusable that those who were endeavouring to refine the very crude community in the midst of which they were anxiously holding up the agate lamp of Psyche, should see nothing to applaud in the vague and shadowy rhapsodies then being issued by a dissipated hack in Philadelphia. What the New England critics wanted, patriotically as well as personally, was as little like "Ulalume" as can possibly be conceived. They defined what poetry should be—there was about that time a mania for defining poetry—and what their definition was may be seen no less plainly in the American *Fable for Critics* than in the preface to the English *Philip van Artevelde*. It was to be picturesque, intellectual, pleasing; it was to deal, above all, with moral "truths"; it was to avoid vagueness and to give no uncertain sound; it was to regard "passion" with alarm, as the siren which was bound sooner or later to fling a bard upon the rocks. It is not necessary to treat

this conception of poetry with scorn, nor to reject principles of precise thought and clear, sober language, which had been illustrated by Wordsworth in the present and by Gray in the past. The ardent young critics of our own age, having thrown off all respect for the traditions of literature, speak and write as if to them, and them alone, had been divinely revealed the secrets of taste. They do not give themselves time to realise that in Apollo's house there are many mansions.

It is sufficient for us to note here that the discomfort of Poe's position resided in the fact that he was not admitted into so much as the forecourt of the particular mansion inhabited by Bryant and Lowell. There is a phrase in one of his own rather vague and "valueless" essays (for Poe was a poor critic) which, as it were accidentally, describes his ideal in poetry, although it is not his own verse of which he is speaking. He described—in 1845, when his ripe genius had just brought forth "The Raven"—the poetic faculty as producing "a sense of dreamy, wild, indefinite, and he would perhaps say, indefinable delight." This shadowy but absorbing and mastering pleasure impregnated his own best writings to such a degree that it gives us the measure of his unlikeness to his contemporaries, and states the claim of his individuality. Without precisely knowing it or perceiving his revolution, in an age of intelligent, tame, lucid and cautiously-defined poetry, Edgar Poe expressed the emotions which surged within him in numbers that were, even to excess, "dreamy, wild, indefinite and indefinable."

His early verses are remarkably exempt from the influences which we might expect to find impressed on them. He imitated, as every man of genuine originality imitates while he learns his trade, but his models were not, as might have been anticipated, Coleridge and Shelley; they were Byron and Scott. In the poetry of Byron and

Scott, Poe found nothing to transfer to his own nature, and the early imitations, therefore, left no trace on him. Brief as is the volume of his poems, half of it might be discarded without much regret. Scattered among his Byron and Scott imitations, however, we find a few pieces which reveal to us that, while he was still almost a child, the true direction of his genius was occasionally revealed to him. The lyric "To Helen," which is said to have been composed in his fourteenth year, is steeped in the peculiar purity, richness and vagueness which were to characterise his mature poems:—

"On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece,
And the grandeur that was Rome."

This was not published, however, until the author was two-and-twenty, and it may have been touched up. Here is a fragment of a suppressed poem, "Visit of the Dead," which Poe certainly printed in his eighteenth year:—

"The breeze, the breath of God, is still,
And the mist upon the hill,
Shadowy, shadowy, yet unbroken,
Is a symbol and a token;
How it hangs upon the trees,
A mystery of mysteries!"

This is not so perfect, but it is even more than "To Helen" symptomatic of Poe's peculiar relation to the poetic faculty as fostering a state of indefinite and indeed indefinable delight. And from these faint breathings how direct is the advance to such incomparable specimens of symbolic fancy as "The City in the Sea," "The Sleeper," and finally "Ulalume"!

The determination to celebrate, in a minor key, indefinite and melancholy symbols of fancy, is a snare than

which none more dangerous can be placed in the path of a feeble foot. But Poe was not feeble, and he was protected, and permanent value was secured for his poetry, by the possession of one or two signal gifts to which attention must now be paid. He cultivated the indefinite, but, happily for us, in language so definite and pure that when he succeeds it is with a cool fulness, an absence of all fretting and hissing sound, such as can rarely be paralleled in English literature. The finest things in Milton's 1645 volume, Wordsworth at his very best, Tennyson occasionally, Collins in some of his shorter odes, have reached that perfection of syllabic sweetness, that clear sound of a wave breaking on the twilight sands, which Poe contrives to render, without an effort, again and again:—

> "By a route obscure and lonely,
> Haunted by ill angels only,
> Where an Eidolon,[1] nam'd Night,
> On a black throne reigns upright,
> I have reached these lands but newly
> From an ultimate dim Thule,
> From a wild weird clime, that lieth, sublime,
> Out of space, out of time."

The present moment is one in which the reaction against plastic beauty in poetry has reached such a height that it is almost vain to appeal against it. There is scarcely a single English poet of consequence in the younger school who does not treat the strings of his lyre as though he were preluding with a slate-pencil upon a slate. That this is done purposely, and in accordance with mysterious harmonic laws entirely beyond the comprehension of ordinary ears, makes the matter worse. There is no heresiarch so dangerous as the priest of holy and self-abnegating life, and it is to a poet no less learned than Mr. Robert Bridges, that the twentieth century seems to owe the existing rage

[1] A shocking false quantity; but how little that would matter to Poe!

for cacophony. He holds something of the same place in relation to Swinburne and Poe, that Donne did to Spenser three hundred years ago. In this condition of things it may seem useless to found any claim for Poe on the ground of the exquisite mellifluousness of his versification. We may hope, however, some day to regain the use of our ears, and to discover once more that music and metre are utterly distinct arts. When that re-discovery has been made, Poe will resume his position as one of the most uniformly melodious of all those who have used the English language.

Critics who have admitted the extraordinary perfection of his prosody have occasionally objected that in the most popular examples of it, "The Raven" and "The Bells," he obtains his effect by a trick. It might be objected, with equal force, that Victor Hugo in "Les Djinns" and even Tennyson in "The Lotus Eaters" made use of "tricks." On the other hand, if the charge be deserved, it seems odd that in the course of nearly seventy years no other juggler or conjurer has contrived to repeat the wonderful experiment. In each poem there are what must be judged definite errors against taste in detail—Poe's taste was never very sure—but the skill of the long voluptuous lamentation, broken at equal intervals by the croak of the raven, and that of the verbal translation, as if into four tones or languages, of the tintinabulation of the bells, is so extraordinary, so original, and so closely in keeping with the personal genius of the writer, that it is surely affectation to deny its value.

It is not, however, in "The Bells" or in "The Raven," marvellous as are these *tours de force*, that we see the essential greatness of Poe revealed. The best of his poems are those in which he deals less boisterously with the sentiment of mystery. During the latest months of his unhappy life, he composed three lyrics which, from a

technical point of view, must be regarded not only as the most interesting which he wrote, but as those which have had the most permanent effect upon subsequent literature, not in England merely, but in France. These are "Ulalume," "Annabel Lee," "For Annie." One of Poe's greatest inventions was the liquidation of stanzaic form, by which he was able to mould it to the movements of emotion without losing its essential structure. Many poets had done this with the line; it was left for Poe to do it with the stanza. In the three latest lyrics this stanzaic legerdemain is practised with an enchanting lightness, an ecstasy of sinuous and elastic grace. Perhaps, had it been subjected to the poet's latest revision, "For Annie" would have been the most wonderful of all in the sensitive response of its metre to the delicate fluctuations of sentiment.

We may, then, briefly summarise that Poe's first claim to commemoration is that he was the pioneer in restoring to the art of poetry a faculty which it had almost lost in its attempt to compete with science and philosophy. It had become the aim of the poets to state facts; it was given to Poe to perceive that no less splendid a future lay before those who only hinted feelings. He was the earliest modern poet who substituted the symbol for the exact description of an object or an event. That "expression directe," about which the French have been debating for the last quarter of a century, and over which M. Adolphe Retté and M. Albert Mockel periodically dispute like Fathers of the Church, was perceived and was deliberately repudiated by Poe eighty years ago. He was deeply impregnated with the sense that the harmony of imagination is not destroyed, but developed, by drawing over a subject veil after veil of suggestion. His native temperament aided him in his research after the symbol. He was naturally a cultivator of terror, one who loved to

people the world with strange and indefinable powers. His dreams were innocent and agitating, occupied with supernatural terrors, weighed upon by the imminence of shadowy presentments. He trembled at he knew not what; in this he was related to the earliest poets of the world, and in his perpetual recurrence to symbol he recalls the action of their alarms.

The cardinal importance, then, of Poe as a poet is that he restored to poetry a primitive faculty of which civilisation seemed successfully to have deprived her. He rejected the doctrinal expression of positive things, and he insisted upon mystery and symbol. He endeavoured to clothe unfathomable thoughts and shadowy images in melody that was like the wind wandering over the strings of an æolian harp. In other words, he was the pioneer of a school which has spread its influence to the confines of the civilised world, and is now revolutionising literature. He was the discoverer and the founder of Symbolism.

1909.

THE AUTHOR OF "PELHAM"

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One hundred and twenty years have nearly passed since the birth of Bulwer-Lytton, and he continues to be suspended in a dim and ambiguous position in the history of our literature. He combined extraordinary qualities with fatal defects. He aimed at the highest eminence, and failed to reach it, but he was like an explorer, who is diverted from the main ascent of a mountain, and yet annexes an important table-land elsewhere. Bulwer-Lytton never secured the ungrudging praise of the best judges, but he attained great popularity, and has even now not wholly lost it. He is never quoted as one of our great writers, and yet he holds a place of his own from which it is improbable that he will ever be dislodged. Although he stood out prominently among his fellows, and although his career was tinged with scandal and even with romance, very little has been known about him. Curiosity has been foiled by the discretion of one party and the malignity of another. The public has not been in a position to know the truth, nor to possess the real portrait of a politician and a man of letters who has been presented as an angel and as a gargoyle, but never as a human being. Forty years after his death the candour and the skill of his grandson reveal him to us at last in a memoir of unusual excellence.

In no case would Lord Lytton's task have been an easy one, but it must have been made peculiarly difficult by the work of those who had preceded him. Of these the only one who deserves serious attention is Robert Lytton, who published certain fragments in 1883. That the son wished

to support the memory of his father is unquestionable. But it is difficult to believe that he intended his contribution to be more than an aid to some future biographer's labour. He scattered his material about him in rough heaps. Apart from the "Literary Remains," which destroyed the continuity of even such brief biography as he gave, Robert Lytton introduced a number of chapters which are more or less of the nature of essays, and are often quite foreign to his theme. Moreover, he dedicated several chapters to literary criticism of his father's works. It is, in fact, obvious to any one who examines the two volumes of 1883 which Robert Lytton contrived to fill, that he was careful to contribute as little as he possibly could to the story which he had started out to relate. Although there is much that is interesting in the memoirs of 1883, the reader is continually losing the thread of the narrative. The reason is, no doubt, that Robert Lytton stood too close to his parents, had seen too much of their disputes, was too much torn by the agonies of his own stormy youth, and was too sensitively conscious of the scandal, to tell the story at all. We have the impression that, in order to forestall any other biography, he pretended himself to write a book which he was subtle enough to make unintelligible.

This baffling discretion, this feverish race from hiding-place to hiding-place, has not only not been repeated by Lord Lytton in the new *Life*, but the example of his father seems to have positively emphasised his own determination to be straightforward and lucid. I know no modern biography in which the writer has kept more rigidly to the business of his narrative, or has less successfully been decoyed aside by the sirens of family vanity. It must have been a great difficulty to the biographer to find his pathway cumbered by the volumes of 1883, set by his father as a plausible man-trap for future intruders.

Lord Lytton, however, is the one person who is not an intruder, and he was the only possessor of the key which his father had so diplomatically hidden. His task, however, was further complicated by the circumstance that Bulwer-Lytton himself left in MS. an autobiography, dealing very fully with his own career and character up to the age of twenty-two. The redundancy of all the Lyttons is amazing. Bulwer-Lytton would not have been himself if he had not overflowed into reflections which swelled his valuable account of his childhood into monstrous proportions. Lord Lytton, who has a pretty humour, tells an anecdote which will be read with pleasure:—

"An old woman, who had once been one of Bulwer-Lytton's trusted domestic servants, is still living in a cottage at Knebworth. One day she was talking to me about my grandfather, and inadvertently used an expression which summed him up more perfectly than any elaborate description could have done. She was describing his house at Copped Hall, where she had been employed as caretaker, and added: 'In one of his attacks of *fluency*, I nursed him there for many weeks.' 'Pleurisy,' I believe, was what she meant."

The *bacillus* of "fluency" interpenetrates the Autobiography, the letters, the documents of every kind, and at any moment this disease will darken Bulwer-Lytton's brightest hours. But curtailed by his grandson, and with its floral and heraldic ornaments well pared away, the Autobiography is a document of considerable value. It is written with deliberate candour, and recalls the manner of Cobbett, a writer with whom we should not expect to find Bulwer-Lytton in sympathy. It is probable that the author of it never saw himself nor those who surrounded him in precisely their true relation. There was something

radically twisted in his image of life, which always seems to have passed through a refracting surface on its way to his vision. No doubt this is more or less true of all experience; no power has given us the gift "to see ourselves as others see us." But in the case of Bulwer-Lytton this refractive habit of his imagination produced a greater swerving aside from positive truth than is usual. The result is that an air of the fabulous, of the incredible, is given to his narratives, and often most unfairly.

A close examination, in fact, of the Autobiography results in confirming the historic truth of it. What is surprising is not, when we come to consider them, the incidents themselves, but Bulwer-Lytton's odd way of narrating them. Lord Lytton, without any comment, provides us with curious material for the verification of his grandfather's narrative. He prints, here and there, letters from entirely prosaic persons which tally, often to a surprising degree, with the extravagant statements of Bulwer-Lytton. To quote a single instance, of a very remarkable character, Bulwer-Lytton describes the effect his scholarship produced, at the age of seventeen, upon sober, elderly people, who were dazzled with his accomplishments and regarded him as a youthful prodigy. It is the sort of confession, rather full-blooded and lyrical, which we might easily set down to that phenomenon of refraction. But Lord Lytton prints a letter from Dr. Samuel Parr (whom, by the way, he calls "a man of sixty-four," but Parr, born in 1747, was seventy-four in 1821), which confirms the autobiographer's account in every particular. The aged Whig churchman, who boasted a wider knowledge of Greek literature than any other scholar of his day, and whose peremptory temper was matter of legend, could write to this Tory boy a long letter of enthusiastic criticism, and while assuring Bulwer-Lytton that he kept "all the letters with which you have honoured me," could add: "I am

proud of such a correspondent; and, if we lived nearer to each other, I should expect to be very happy indeed in such a friend." Letters of this kind, judiciously printed by Lord Lytton in his notes, serve to call us back from the nebulous witchcraft in which Bulwer-Lytton was so fond of wrapping up the truth, and to remind us that, in spite of the necromancer, the truth is there.

From the point where the fragment of autobiography closes, although for some time much the same material is used and some of the same letters are quoted, as were quoted and used by Robert Lytton, the presentation of these is so different that the whole effect is practically one of novelty. But with the year 1826, when Edward Bulwer-Lytton, at the age of three-and-twenty, became engaged to Rosina Doyle Wheeler, all is positively new. The story of the marriage, separation, and subsequent relations has never before been presented to the world with any approach to accuracy or fulness. No biographical notices of Bulwer-Lytton even touch on this subject, which has been hitherto abandoned to the gossip of irresponsible contemporaries. It is true that a Miss Devey composed a "Life of Rosina, Lady Lytton," in which the tale was told. This work was immediately suppressed, and is inaccessible to the public; but the only person who is known to be familiar with its contents reports that it "contains fragments of the narrative, obviously biassed, wholly inaccurate, and evidently misleading." So far as the general public is concerned, Lord Lytton's impartial history of the relations between his grandfather and his grandmother is doubtless that portion of his book which will be regarded as the most important. I may, therefore, dwell briefly upon his treatment of it.

The biographer, in dealing with a subject of this incalculable difficulty, could but lay himself open to the censure of those who dislike the revelation of the truth on any disagreeable subject. This lion, however, stood in the middle

of his path, and he had either to wrestle with it or to turn back. Lord Lytton says in his preface that it was necessary to tell all or nothing of the matrimonial adventures of his grandparents, but, in reality, this was not quite the alternative, which was to tell the truth or to withdraw from the task of writing a Life of Bulwer-Lytton. The marriage and its results were so predominant in the career of the man, and poisoned it so deeply to the latest hour of his consciousness, that to attempt a biography of him without clear reference to them would have been like telling the story of Nessus the Centaur without mentioning the poisoned arrow of Heracles. But Lord Lytton shall give his own apology :—

"As it was impossible to give a true picture of my grandfather without referring to events which overshadowed his whole life, and which were already partially known to the public, I decided to tell the whole story as fully and as accurately as possible, in the firm belief that the truth can damage neither the dead nor the living. The steps which led to the final separation between my grandparents, and the forces which brought about so disastrous a conclusion of a marriage of love, apart from their biographical interest, afford a study of human nature of the utmost value; and so great are the moral lessons which this story contains, that I venture to hope that the public may find in much that is tragic and pitiful much also that is redeeming, and that the ultimate verdict of posterity may be that these two unfortunate people did not suffer entirely in vain."

His story, therefore, is not written with any partiality, and it seems to be as full and as truthful as the ample materials at the author's disposal permitted. The reader will conjecture that Lord Lytton could have given many

more details, but apart from the fact that they would often have been wholly unfit for publication, it is difficult to see that they would in any degree have altered the balance of the story, or modified our judgment, which is quite sufficiently enlightened by the copious letters on both sides which are now for the first time printed.

Voltaire has remarked of love that it is "de toutes les passions la plus forte, parce qu'elle attaque, à la fois, la tête, le cœur, le corps." It is a commonplace to say that Edward Bulwer's whole career might have been altered if he had never met Rosina Wheeler, because this is true in measure of every strong juvenile attachment: but it is rarely indeed so copiously or so fatally true as it was in his case. His existence was overwhelmed by this event; it was turned topsy-turvey, and it never regained its equilibrium. In this adventure all was exaggerated; there was excess of desire, excess of gratification, an intense weariness, a consuming hatred.

On the first evening when the lovers met, in April 1826, an observer, watching them as they talked, reflected that Bulwer's "bearing had that aristocratic something bordering on *hauteur*" which reminded the onlooker "of the passage, 'Stand back; I am holier than thou!'" The same observer, dazzled, like the rest of the world, by the loveliness of Miss Wheeler, judged that it would be best "to regard her as we do some beautiful caged wild creature of the woods—at a safe and secure distance." It would have preserved a chance of happiness for Bulwer-Lytton to possess something of this stranger's clairvoyance. It was not strange perhaps, but unfortunate, that he did not notice—or rather that he was not repelled by, for he did notice—the absence of moral delicacy in the beautiful creature, the radiant and seductive Lamia, who responded so instantly to his emotion. He, the most fastidious of men, was not offended by the vivacity of a young lady

who called attention to the vulgarity of her father's worsted stockings and had none but words of abuse for her mother. These things, indeed, disconcerted the young aristocrat, but he put them down to a lack of training; he persuaded himself that these were superficial blemishes and could be remedied; and he resigned his senses to the intoxication of Rosina's beauty.

At first—and indeed to the last—she stimulated his energy and his intellect. His love and his hatred alike spurred him to action. In August 1826, in spite of the violent opposition of his mother, he and Rosina were betrothed. By October Mrs. Bulwer had so far prevailed that the engagement was broken off, and Edward tossed in a whirlpool of anger, love, and despair. It took the form of such an attack of "fluency" as was never seen before or after. Up to that time he had been an elegant although feverish idler. Now he plunged into a strenuous life of public and private engagements. He prepared to enter the House of Commons; he finished *Falkland*, his first novel; he started the composition of *Pelham* and of another "light prose work," which may have disappeared; he achieved a long narrative in verse, *O'Neill, or the Rebel;* and he involved himself in literary projects without bound and without end. The aim of all this energy was money. It is true that he had broken off his betrothal; but it was at first only a pretence at estrangement, to hoodwink his mother. He was convinced that he could not live without possessing Rosina, and as his mother held the strings of the common purse, he would earn his own income and support a wife.

Mrs. Bulwer-Lytton, who had a Roman firmness, was absolutely determined that her son should not marry "a penniless girl whose education had been so flagrantly neglected, who was vain and flighty, with a mocking humour and a conspicuous lack of principle." At this point the

story becomes exceedingly interesting. A Balzac would strip it of its romantic trappings, and would penetrate into its physiology. Out of Rosina's sight, and diverted by the excess of his literary labours, Edward's infatuation began to decline. His mother, whose power of character would have been really formidable if it had been enforced by sympathy or even by tact, relaxed her opposition; and instantly her son, himself, no longer attacked, became calmer and more clear-sighted. Rosina's faults were patent to his memory; the magic of her beauty less invincible. Within a month all was changed again. Rosina fretted herself into what she contrived to have reported to Bulwer-Lytton as an illness. She begged for an interview, and he went with reluctance to bid her farewell for ever. It was Bulwer-Lytton's habit to take with him a masterpiece of literature upon every journey. It seems unfortunate that on this occasion *The Tempest* was not his companion, for it might have warned him, as Prospero warned Ferdinand, against the fever in the blood:—

> "No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall
> To make this contract grow; but barren hate,
> Sour-eyed disdain, and discord, shall bestrew
> The union of your bed, with weeds so loathly
> That you shall hate it, both."

When his short interview, which was to have been a final one, was over, that had happened which made a speedy marriage necessary, whatever the consequences might be.

The new conditions were clearly stated to old Mrs. Bulwer-Lytton, but that formidable lady belonged to an earlier generation, and saw no reason for Quixotic behaviour. Her conscience had been trained in the eighteenth century, and all her blame was for Rosina Wheeler. Torn between his duty and his filial affection, Bulwer-Lytton now passed through a period of moral agony. He wrote to his mother: "I am far too wretched, and have had too severe a contest

with myself, not to look to the future rather with despondency than pleasure, and the view you take of the matter is quite enough to embitter my peace of mind." Miss Wheeler, not unnaturally stung to anger, used disrespectful expressions regarding Mrs. Bulwer-Lytton, and these bickerings filled the lover and son with indignation. His life, between these ladies, grew to be hardly worth living, and in the midst of one such crisis this brilliant young dandy of four-and-twenty wrote:—"I feel more broken-hearted, despondent, and sated than any old valetudinarian who has seen all his old hopes and friends drop off one by one, and finds himself left for the rest of his existence to the solitary possession of gloom and gout." Mrs. Bulwer-Lytton fought fiercely to the last, and Edward determined to close the matter; on August 29th, 1827, he married Rosina.

At first, in spite of, and even because of, the wild hostility of his mother, the marriage seemed successful. The rage of the mother drove the husband to the wife. Lord Lytton has noted that in later years all that his grandfather and his grandmother said about one another was unconsciously biassed by their memory of later complications. Neither Bulwer-Lytton nor Rosina could give an accurate history of their relations at the beginning, because the mind of each was prejudiced by their knowledge of the end. Each sought to justify the hatred which both had lived to feel, by representing the other as hateful from the first. But the letters survive, and the recollections of friends, to prove that this was entirely untrue. It must be admitted that their union was never based upon esteem, but wholly upon passion, and that from the first they lacked that coherency of relation, in moral respects, which was needed to fix their affections. But those who have dimly heard how bitterly these two unfortunate people hated one another in later life will be astonished to learn that

they spent the two first years together like infatuated turtle-doves.

Their existence was romantic and absurd. Cut off from all support by the implacable anger of old Mrs. Bulwer-Lytton, they depended on a combined income of £380 a year and whatever the husband could make to increase it. Accordingly they took a huge country house, Woodcot in Oxon, and lived at the rate of several thousands a year. There they basked in an affluent splendour of bad taste which reminds us of nothing in the world so much as of those portions of *The Lady Flabella* which Mrs. Wititterly was presently to find so soft and so voluptuous. The following extract from one of Rosina's lively letters—and she was a very sprightly correspondent—gives an example of her style, of her husband's Pelhamish extravagance, and of the gaudy recklessness of their manner of life. They had now been married nearly two years:—

"How do you think my audacious husband has spent his time since he has been in town? Why, he must needs send me down what he termed a little Christmas box, which was a huge box from Howel and James's, containing only eight Gros de Naples dresses of different colours not made up, four Gros des Indes, two merino ones, four satin ones, an amber, a black, a white and a blue, eight pocket handkerchiefs that look as if they had been spun out of lilies and air and *brodée* by the fairies, they are so exquisitely fine and so beautifully worked. Four pieces (16 yards in each) of beautiful white blonde, two broad pieces and two less broad, a beautiful and very large blue real cashmere shawl, a Chantilly veil that would reach from this to Dublin, and six French long pellerines very richly embroidered on the finest India muslin, three dozen pair of white silk stockings, one dozen of black, a most beautiful black satin cloak with very pretty odd sort of capes and trimmed round

and up the sides with a very broad band of a new kind of figured plush—I forget what they call it (it came from Paris), and a hat of the same—such a hat as can only be made in the Rue Vivienne. You would think that this 'little Christmas box' would have been enough to have lasted for some time. However, he thought differently, for on New Year's morning before I was out of bed, there came a parcel by the mail, which on opening proved to be a large red Morocco case containing a bright gold chain, a yard and a half long, with the most beautiful and curious cross to it that I ever saw—the chain is as thick as my dead gold necklace, and you may guess what sort of a thing it is when I tell you that I took it to a jeweller here to have it weighed, and it weighed a pound all but an ounce. The man said it never was made for less than fifty guineas, but that he should think it had cost more."

Rosina, who has only £80 a year of her own, will not be outdone, and cannot "resist ordering" Edward "a gold toilette, which he has long wished for. . . . Round the rim of the basin and the handle of the ewer I have ordered a wreath of *narcissus* in dead gold, which, for Mr. Pelham, you'll own, is not a bad idea."

It would be expected that all this crazy display would lead the young couple rapidly and deeply into debt. That it did not do so is the most curious phase of the story. Bulwer-Lytton immediately, and apparently without the slightest difficulty, developed a literary industry the sober record of which approaches the fabulous. Walter Scott alone may be held to have equalled it. The giants of popular fiction did, indeed, enjoy larger single successes than Bulwer-Lytton did, but none of them, not Dickens himself, was so uniformly successful. Everything he wrote sold as though it were bread displayed to a hungry crowd. Even his poetry, so laboriously and lifelessly second-hand,

always sold. He did not know what failure was; he made money by *Devereux;* even *The New Timon* went into many editions. To earn what was required, however—and in these early years he seems to have made £3000 his minimum of needful return—to live in the insane style which his wife and he demanded, an enormous nervous strain was required. Edward Bulwer-Lytton's temper had always been warm and eager; it now grew irritable to the highest degree. His mother continued to exasperate him; his wife suddenly failed to please him; his health waned; and he became the most miserable of men; yet without ceasing for a moment to be the most indefatigable of authors. The reader will follow the evolution of the tragedy, which is of poignant interest, in Lord Lytton's pages. The whole story is one of the most extraordinary in the history of literature.

It has been a feature of Bulwer-Lytton's curious posthumous fortune that he has seemed solitary in his intellectual if not in his political and social action. We think of him as one of those morose and lonely bees that are too busy gathering pollen to join the senate of the hive, and are dwellers in the holes of the rocks. It is quite true that, with a painful craving for affection, he had not the genius of friendship. The general impression given by his biography is one of isolation; in "the sea of life" he was one of those who are most hopelessly "enisled." Nothing is sadder than this severance of a delicate and sensitive temperament from those who surround it closely and to whom it stretches out its arms in vain. But a careful reading of these interesting volumes leaves us in no doubt of the cause of this loneliness. Bulwer-Lytton, with all his ardour and his generosity, was devoid of the gift of sympathy. In characters of a simpler mould a natural kindliness may take the place of comprehension. But Bulwer-Lytton had a lively and protean fancy which

perpetually deceived him. In human relations he was always moving, but always on the wrong track.

The letters to his mother, to his wife, to his son, exemplify this unfortunate tendency. They are eloquent, they are even too eloquent, for Bulwer-Lytton intoxicated himself with his own verbosity; they are meant to be kind, they are meant to be just, they are meant to be wise and dignified and tender; but we see, in Lord Lytton's impartial narrative, that they scarcely ever failed to exasperate the receiver. His dealings with his son, of whom he was exquisitely proud and sensitively fond, are of the saddest character, because of the father's want of comprehension, haste of speech and intolerance of temper. The very fact that a son, a wife, or a mother could with impunity be addressed in terms of exaggerated sensibility, because there could be no appeal, was a snare to the too-ready pen of Bulwer-Lytton, which poured out its oceans of ink without reflection and without apprehension. If violent offence were given, the post went out again later in the day, and equally violent self-humiliation would restore the emotional balance. But what could not be restored was the sense of confidence and domestic security.

In his contact with other literary men of his own age more restraint was necessary, and we learn from Lord Lytton's pages of valuable and prolonged acquaintanceships which were sometimes almost friendships. His company was much sought after, and occasionally by very odd persons. Lord Lytton prints a series of most diverting letters from the notorious Harriette Wilson, who, in spite of the terror into which her "Memoirs" had thrown society, desired to add the author of *Pelham* to the aviary of her conquests. But the snare was set in vain before the eyes of so shrewd a bird as Bulwer-Lytton; he declined to see the lady, but he kept her amazing letters. This was in 1829, when the novelist seems to have had no literary

or political associates. But by 1831, we find him editing the *New Monthly Magazine*, and attaching himself to Lord Melbourne and Lord Durham on the one hand and to Disraeli and Dickens on the other. When to these we have added Lady Blessington and Letitia Landon, we have mentioned all those public persons with whom Bulwer-Lytton seems to have been on terms of intimacy during his early manhood. All through these years he was an incessant diner-out and party-goer, and the object of marvellous adulation, but he passed through all this social parade as though it had been a necessary portion of the exterior etiquette of life. Why he fatigued himself by these formal exercises, in which he seems to have found no pleasure, it is impossible to conceive, but a sense of the necessity of parade was strangely native to him.

He had, however, one close and constant friend. John Forster was by far the most intimate of all his associates throughout his career. Bulwer-Lytton seems to have met him first about 1834, when he was twenty-eight and Forster only twenty-two. In spite of this disparity in age, the younger man almost at once took a tone of authority such as the elder seldom permitted in an acquaintance. Forster had all the gifts which make a friend valuable. He was rich in sympathy and resource, his temper was reasonable, he comprehended a situation, he knew how to hold his own in argument and yet yield with grace. Lord Lytton prints a very interesting character-sketch of Forster, which he has found among his grandfather's MSS. It is a tribute which does equal credit to him who makes it and to him of whom it is made :—

" John Forster . . . A most sterling man, with an intellect at once massive and delicate. Few, indeed, have his strong practical sense and sound judgment; fewer still unite with such qualities his exquisite appreciation of laten

beauties in literary art. Hence, in ordinary life, there is no safer adviser about literary work, especially poetry; no more refined critic. A large heart naturally accompanies so masculine an understanding. He has the rare capacity for affection which embraces many friendships without loss of depth or warmth in one. Most of my literary contemporaries are his intimate companions, and their jealousies of each other do not diminish their trust in him. More than any living critic, he has served to establish reputations. Tennyson and Browning owed him much in their literary career. Me, I think, he served in that way less than any of his other friends. But, indeed, I know of no critic to whom I have been much indebted for any position I hold in literature. In more private matters I am greatly indebted to his counsels. His reading is extensive. What faults he has lie on the surface. He is sometimes bluff to rudeness. But all such faults of manner (and they are his only ones) are but trifling inequalities in a nature solid and valuable as a block of gold."

This was written with full experience, as the names of Tennyson and Browning will remind us, for Bulwer-Lytton was slow to admit the value of these younger talents. His relations with Tennyson have always been known to be unfortunate; as they are revealed in Lord Lytton's biography they approach the incredible. He met Browning at Covent Garden Theatre during the Macready "revival" of the poetic stage, but it was not until after the publication of *Men and Women* that he became conscious of Browning's claim, which he then very grudgingly admitted. He was grateful to Browning for his kindness to Robert Lytton in Italy, but he never understood his genius or his character.

What, however, we read with no less pleasure than surprise are the evidences of Bulwer-Lytton's interest in

certain authors of a later generation, of whom the general public has never suspected him to have been aware. Something almost like friendship sprang up as lately as 1867 between him and a man whom nobody would suppose him to admire, Matthew Arnold. It sometimes happens that a sensitive and petulant artist finds it more easy to acknowledge the merits of his successors than to endure those of his immediate contemporaries. The *Essays in Criticism* and *The Study of Celtic Literature* called forth from the author of *My Novel* and *The Caxtons* such eulogy as had never been spared for the writings of Thackeray or Carlyle. Matthew Arnold appeared to Bulwer-Lytton to have "brought together all that is most modern in sentiment, with all that is most scholastic in thought and language." Arnold was a guest at Knebworth, and brought the Duke of Genoa with him. He liked Bulwer-Lytton, and their relations became very cordial and lasted for some years; Arnold has given an amusing, but very sympathetic, account of the dignified hospitalities of Knebworth.

No revelation in Lord Lytton's volumes is, however, more pleasing or more unexpected than his grandfather's correspondence with Swinburne. It is thought that he heard of him through Monckton Milnes; at all events, he was an early reader of *Atalanta in Calydon*. When, in 1866, all the furies of the Press fell shrieking on *Poems and Ballads*, Bulwer-Lytton took a very generous step. He wrote to Swinburne, expressing his sympathy and begging him to be calm. The young poet was extremely touched, and took occasion to beg the elder writer for his advice, the publisher having, without consulting him, withdrawn his volume from sale. Bulwer-Lytton's reply was a most cordial invitation to stay with him at Knebworth and talk the matter over. Swinburne gratefully accepted, and John Forster was asked to meet him. It was Bulwer-Lytton, it appears, who found another publisher for the outraged

volume, and helped Swinburne out of the scrape. He was always kindness itself if an appeal was made to his protection, and to his sense of justice. However, pleasant as the visit to Knebworth was, there is no evidence that it was repeated. Bulwer-Lytton considered Swinburne's opinions preposterous, and indeed if he told Swinburne, as in 1869 he told his son Robert, that Victor Hugo was "but an epileptic dwarf in a state of galvanism," there must have been wigs on the green at Knebworth.

The student of the biography, if he is already familiar with the more characteristic works of Bulwer-Lytton, will find himself for the first time provided with a key to much that has puzzled him in the nature of that author. The story itself, apart from the tragic matrimonial trouble which runs through it like a blood-red cord, is of unusual interest. It is a story of strife, without repose, without enjoyment, but with a good deal of splendour and satisfaction. Almost to the end Bulwer-Lytton was engaged in struggle. As an ambitious social being he was fighting the world; as an author he was battling with his critics; as a statesman he was always in the wild storm of party politics. As a private individual he was all the time keeping his head up against the tide of social scandal which attacked him when he least expected it, and often threatened to drown him altogether. This turmoil contrasts with the calm of the evening years, after the peerage had been won, the ambition satisfied, the literary reputation secured.

Few writers have encountered, in their own time and after their death, so much adverse criticism, and yet have partly survived it. It is hardly realised, even perhaps by Lord Lytton, how unwilling the reviewers were to give credit to his grandfather. He never found favour in their eyes, and it was a matter of constant resentment with him that they did him, as he thought, injustice. The evidence of his wounded feelings is constant in his letters.

The *Quarterly Review* never mentioned him without contempt until 1865, when the publication of his works, in forty-three volumes, forced it to consider this indefatigable and popular writer with a measure of respect. Sir Walter Scott, with his universal geniality, read *Pelham* in 1828 and "found it very interesting: the light is easy and gentlemanlike, the dark very grand and sombrous." He asked who was the author, and he tried to interest his son-in-law in the novel. But Lockhart was implacable: "*Pelham*," he replied, "is writ by a Mr. Bulwer, a Norfolk squire, and horrid puppy. I have not read the book, from disliking the author." Lockhart, however, did read *Devereux*, and three years afterwards, when reviewing some other novel, he said of the historical characters in that romance: "It seems hard to disquiet so many bright spirits for the sole purpose of showing that they *could* be dull." That was the attitude of the higher criticism to Bulwer-Lytton from, let us say, 1830 to 1860; he was "a horrid puppy" and he was also "dull."

But this was far from being the opinion of the reading public. We have seen that he never failed, and sometimes he soared into the very empyrean of popularity. In 1834, when he published *The Last Days of Pompeii*, again in 1837 when he published *Ernest Maltravers*, the ecstasy of his adorers discovered their favourite in a moment under the mask of anonymity which he chose to assume. This was just before the outburst of the great school of Victorian novelists; Bulwer had as yet practically no one but Disraeli to compete with. These two, the author of *Pelham* and the author of *Vivian Grey*, raced neck and neck at the head of the vast horde of "fashionable" novel-writers, now all but them forgotten. In Bulwer-Lytton's romances the reader moved among exalted personages, alternately flippant and sinister; a "mournful enthusiasm" was claimed for the writer by the readers of his day. It was the latest and most

powerful development of that Byronic spirit which had been so shortlived in verse, but which was to survive in prose until Bulwer-Lytton adopted his *Caxtons* manner in the middle of the century. As always in Byronic periods, the portrait of the author himself was searched for among his most fatal conceptions. To the young library subscriber the stoical, solitary figure of Mordaunt, in *The Disowned*, was exactly what was wanted as a representation of the mysterious novelist himself. Pelham was the apotheosis of the man of fashion, and it is amusing to read how, when the Bulwer-Lyttons travelled, they were gazed at in reverence as the Pelham and the Pelhamess.

It would be difficult to improve upon the language used so early as 1832 by one of the very few critics who attempted to do justice to Bulwer-Lytton's merits. The *Edinburgh Review* found in him "a style vigorous and pliable, sometimes strangely incorrect, but often rising into a touching eloquence." Ten years later such was the private opinion of D. G. Rossetti, who was "inspired by reading *Rienzi* and *Ernest Maltravers*, which is indeed a splendid work." Now that we look back at Bulwer-Lytton's prodigious compositions, we are able to perceive more justly than did the critics of his own day what his merits were. For one thing, he was extraordinarily versatile. If we examine his books, we must be astonished at their variety. He painted the social life of his own day, he dived into spectral romance, he revived the beautiful ceremonies of antiquity, he evoked the great shades of English and of Continental history, he made realistic and humorous studies of middle-class life, he engaged in vehement controversy on topics of the hour, he prophesied of the order of the future, he wrote comedies and tragedies, epics and epistles, satires and lyrics. His canvasses were myriad and he crowded every one of them with figures. At his most Byronic moment he flung his dark cloak aside, and danced in motley through *Paul*

Clifford, with its outrageous caricature of George IV. and his Ministers as a gang of Hounslow highwaymen. Perhaps his best claim to regard is the insatiability of his human curiosity, evinced in the almost infinite variety of his compositions.

The singular being who wrote so large a library of works and whose actual features have so carefully been concealed from the public, will be known at last. The piety of his grandson has presented him to us with no reservations and no false lights. Here he stands, this half-fabulous being, not sheathed in sham armour and padding the stage in buskins, but a real personality at length, "with all his weaknesses and faults, his prejudices, affectations, vanities, susceptibilities, and eccentricities, and also with all his great qualities of industry, courage, kindness of heart; sound judgment, patience, and perseverance." Lord Lytton has carried through to the close a biographical enterprise of unusual difficulty, and he deserves the thanks of all students of English literature.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE BRONTËS

THE CHALLENGE OF THE BRONTËS [1]

ALTHOUGH I possess in no degree the advantage which so many of the members of your society enjoy in being personally connected with the scenes and even, perhaps, with the characters associated with the Brontë family, I cannot begin my little address to you to-day without some invocation of the genius of the place. We meet at Dewsbury because the immortal sisters were identified with Dewsbury. Is it then not imperative that for whatever picture of them I may endeavour to present before you this afternoon, Dewsbury should form the background? Unfortunately, however, although in the hands of a skilful painter the figures of the ladies may glow forth, I fear that in the matter of taking Dewsbury as the background some vagueness and some darkness are inevitable. In the biographies of Mrs. Gaskell and of Mr. Clement Shorter, as well as in the proceedings of your society, I have searched for evidences of the place Dewsbury took in the lives of the Brontës. What I find—I expect you to tell me that it is not exhaustive—is this. Their father, the Rev. Patrick Brontë, was curate here from 1809 to 1811. In 1836, when Charlotte was twenty, Miss Wooler transferred her school from Roe Head to Heald's House at the top of Dewsbury Moor. In this school, where

[1] Address delivered before the Brontë Society in the Town Hall of Dewsbury, March 28th, 1903.

Charlotte had been a pupil since 1831, she was now a governess, and a governess she remained until early in 1838. In April of that year Miss Wooler was taken ill and Charlotte was for a little while in charge. Then there was an explosion of temper, of some kind, and Charlotte went back to Haworth.

That, then, in the main, is the limit of what the scrupulous Muse of history vouchsafes to tell us about Charlotte Brontë's relation to Dewsbury. But it also supplies us with one or two phrases which I cannot bring myself to spare you. In January 1838, Charlotte reviews her experience at Dewsbury Moor; "I feel," she says, "in nothing better, nothing humbler nor purer." Again, in 1841, after there had passed time enough to mellow her exacerbations, she continues to express herself with vigour. Miss Wooler is making overtures to Charlotte and Emily to take over the school at Heald's House; perhaps a place might be found for Anne as well. Miss Wooler, one of the kindest of women, is most thoughtful, most conciliatory. Charlotte will have none of the idea; she puts it roughly from her. Of Dewsbury she has nothing to say but that "it is a poisoned place for me." This is all we know of Charlotte's relation to Dewsbury, yet nothing, you will tell me, in Froude's phrase, to what the angels know. Well, I must be frank with you and say that I am afraid the angels have been inclined to record exceedingly little of Charlotte Brontë's residence in your inoffensive neighbourhood. I have to paint a background to my picture, and I find none but the gloomiest colours. They have to be what the art-critics of the eighteenth century called "sub-fusc." But it is not the fault of Dewsbury, it is the fault, or the misfortune, of our remarkable little genius. She was here, in this wholesome and hospitable vicinity, for several months, during which time "she felt in nothing better, neither humbler nor purer," and looking

back upon it, she had to admit that it was "a poisoned place" to her.

I cannot help fancying that you will agree with me, that on such an occasion as the present, and especially when dealing with a group of writers about whom so much as has been said as about the Brontës, it is wise not to cover too wide a ground, but to take, and keep to, one aspect of the subject. Our little excursion into the history seems to have given us, under the heading "Dewsbury," a rather grim text, from which, nevertheless, we may perhaps extract some final consolation. Let me say at the outset that for the grimness, for the harshness, Dewsbury is not at all to blame. I fancy that if, in the years from 1836 to 1838, the Brontë girls had been visitors to Kubla Khan, and had been fed on honey by his myrmidons at Xanadu, that pleasure-dome would yet have been "poisoned" to them. It was not poverty, and cold, and the disagreeable position of a governess, it was not the rough landscape of your moors, nor its lack of southern amenity which made Charlotte wretched here. It was not in good Miss Wooler, nor in the pupils, nor in the visitors at Heald's House that the mischief lay, it was in the closed and patient crater of Charlotte's own bosom. And I am almost persuaded that, if you had lived in Dewsbury sixty-five years ago, you would have heard on very quiet days a faint subterranean sound which you would never have been able to guess was really the passion, furiously panting, shut up in the heart of a small, pale governess in Heald's House schoolroom.

If you accuse me of fatalism, I am helpless in your hands, for I confess I do not see how it could be otherwise, and do scarcely wish that it could have been. Let us not be too sentimental in this matter. Figures in literature are notable and valuable to us for what they give us. The more personal and intense and definite that is, the greater

the gift, the more strenuous the toil and the more severe the initiation which lead to its expression. The Brontës had a certain thing to learn to give; what that was we shall presently try to note. But whatever we find it to be, we start with allowing that it was extremely and boldly original. It was not to be mastered by lying upon padded sofas and toying with a little Berlin wool-work. It involved pain, resistance, a stern revision of things hitherto taken for granted. The secrets which they designed to wring from nature and from life were not likely to be revealed to the self-indulgent and the dilettante. The sisters had a message from the sphere of indignation and revolt. In order that they should learn it as well as teach it, it was necessary that they should arrive on the scene at an evil hour for their own happiness. *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* and *Villette* could not have been written unless, for long years, the world had been "a poisoned place" for Charlotte Brontë.

It has been excellently said by Mrs. Humphry Ward that in many respects, and to the very last, the Brontës challenge no less than they attract us. This is an aspect which, in the midst of rapturous modern heroine-worship, we are apt to forget. Thackeray, who respected the genius of the family, and was immensely kind to the author of *Jane Eyre*, never really felt comfortable in her company. We know how he stole out of his own front-door, and slipped away into the night to escape her. "A very austere little person," he called her, and we may put what emphasis on the austerity we will. I feel sure that any maladroit "white-washing of Charlotte" will tend, sooner or later, good-natured though it may be, in a failure to comprehend what she really was, in what her merit consisted, what the element in her was that, for instance, calls us here together nearly half a century after she completed her work and passed away. Young persons of genius

very commonly write depressing books; since, the more vivid an unripe creature's impression of life is, the more acute is its distress. It is only extremely stupid Sunday-school children who shout in chorus, "We are so happy, happy, happy!" Genius thrown naked, with exposed nerves, on a hard indifferent world, is never "happy" at first. Earth is a "poisoned place" to it, until it has won its way and woven its garments and discovered its food.

But in the case of Charlotte Brontë, unhappiness was more than juvenile fretfulness. All her career was a revolt against conventionality, against isolation, against irresistible natural forces, such as climate and ill-health and physical insignificance. Would this insubmissive spirit have passed out of her writings, as it passed, for instance, out of those of George Sand? I am not sure, for we see it as strongly, though more gracefully and skilfully expressed, in *Villette* as in the early letters which her biographers have printed. Her hatred of what was commonplace and narrow and obvious flung her against a wall of prejudice, which she could not break down. She could only point to it by her exhausting efforts; she could only invite the generation which succeeded her to bring their pickaxes to bear upon it. Hence, to the very last, she seems, more than any other figure in our literature, to be forever ruffled in temper, for ever angry and wounded and indignant, rejecting consolation, crouched like a sick animal in the cavern of her own quenchless pride. This is not an amiable attitude, nor is it historically true that this was Charlotte Brontë's constant aspect. But I will venture to say that her amiabilities, her yielding moods, are really the unessential parts of her disposition, and that a certain admirable ferocity is the notable feature of her intellectual character.

Her great heart was always bleeding. Here at Dewsbury, in the years we are contemplating, the hemorrhage

was of the most doleful kind, for it was concealed, suppressed, it was an inward flow. When once she became an author the pain of her soul was relieved. She said, in 1850, looking back on the publication of the hapless first volume of poems, "The mere effort to succeed gave a wonderful zest to existence." Then, a little later, when no one had paid the slightest attention to the slender trio of maiden voices, "Something like the chill of despair began to invade their hearts." With a less powerful inspiration, they must have ceased to make the effort; they must have succumbed in a melancholy oblivion. But they were saved by the instinct of a mission. It was not their private grief which primarily stirred them. What urged them on was the dim consciousness that they gave voice to a dumb sense of the suffering of all the world. They had to go on working; they had to pursue their course, though it might seem sinister or fatal; their business was to move mankind, not to indulge or please it. They "must be honest; they must not varnish, soften, or conceal."

What Charlotte Brontë was learning to do in her grim and, let us admit it, her unlovely probation on Dewsbury Moor, was to introduce a fresh aspect of the relations of literature to life. Every great writer has a new note; hers was—defiance. All the aspects in which life presented itself to her were distressing, not so much in themselves as in herself. She rebelled against the outrages of poverty, and she drank to its dregs the cup of straitened circumstances. She was proud, as proud as Lucifer, and she was forced into positions which suppleness and cheerfulness might have made tolerable, if not agreeable. She wrung from these positions their last drop of bitterness. A very remarkable instance of this may be found in her relation to the Sidgwick family, who, by universal report, were generous, genial, and unassuming. To Charlotte

Brontë these kindly, if somewhat commonplace folk, grew to seem what a Turkish pasha seems to the inhabitants of a Macedonian village. It was not merely the surroundings of her life—it was life itself, in its general mundane arrangements, which was intolerable to her. She fretted in it, she beat her wings against its bars, and she would have done the same if those bars had been of gold, and if the fruits of paradise had been pushed to her between them. This, I think, is why the expression of her anger seems too often disproportionate, and why her irony is so apt to be preposterous. She was born to resist being caged in any form. Her defiance was universal, and often it was almost indiscriminate.

Do not let us presume to blame this insubmission. Still less let us commit the folly of minimising it. A good cheerful little Charlotte Brontë, who thought the best of everybody, who gaily took her place without a grudging sigh, whose first aim was to make those about her happy and to minister to their illusions, would have been a much more welcome inmate of Miss Wooler's household than the cantankerous governess whom nobody could please, whose susceptibilities were always on edge, whose lonely arrogance made her feared by all but one or two who timidly persisted in loving her. But such a paragon of the obvious virtues would have passed as the birds pass and as the flowers. She would have left no mark behind. She would never have enriched the literature of England by one of its master-evidences of the force of human will. She would never have stirred hundreds of thousands of consciences to a wholesome questioning of fate and their own souls.

Let us endeavour to pursue the inquiry a few steps further. It is impossible to separate the ethical conditions of an author's mind from the work that he produces. The flower requires the soil; it betrays in its colour and its

perfume the environment of its root. The moral constitution of the writer is reflected in the influence of the written page. This is the incessant contention; on one hand the independence of art asserts itself; on the other, it is impossible to escape from the implicit influence of conduct upon art. There have been few writers of any age in whom this battle raged more fiercely than it did in Charlotte Brontë. Her books, and those of her sisters, seem anodyne enough to-day; to readers of a sensitive species they seemed, when they were published, as dangerous as *Werther* had been, as seductive as the *Nouvelle Heloïse*. The reason of this was, in the main, the spirit of revolt which inspired them. There was something harsh and glaring in their landscape; there was that touch of Salvator Rosa which one of their earliest critics observed in them. But more essential was the stubbornness, the unflinching determination to revise all accepted formulas of conduct, to do this or that, not because it was usual to do it, but because it was rational, and in harmony with human nature.

Into an age which had become almost exclusively utilitarian, and in which the exercise of the imagination, in its real forms, was sedulously discountenanced, Charlotte Brontë introduced passion in the sphere of prose fiction, as Byron had introduced it in the sphere of verse thirty years earlier. It was an inestimable gift; it had to come to us, from Charlotte Brontë or another, to save our literature from a decline into triviality and pretension. But she suffered, as Byron had suffered, in the direct ratio of her originality. If a writer employs passion in an age which has ceased to recognise it as one of the necessities of literary vitality he is safe to be accused of perverting his readers. Balzac says, "When nothing else can be charged against an author, the reproach of immorality is thrown at his head." When we study the record of the

grim life of the sisters at Haworth, like that of three young soldiers round a camp-fire with the unseen enemy prowling in the darkness just out of their sight—when we think of the strenuous vigil, the intractable and indomitable persistence, the splendour of the artistic result—we may console ourselves in our anger at the insults they endured, by reflecting how little they cared. And their noble indifference to opinion further endears them to us. We may repeat of them all what Charlotte in a letter once said of Emily, "A certain harshness in her powerful and peculiar character only makes me cling to her more."

This insubmissiveness, which was the unconscious armour given to protect her against the inevitable attacks of fortune, while, on the other hand, it was the very sign-manual of Charlotte's genius, was, on the other, a drawback from which she did not live long enough to emancipate her nature. It is responsible for her lack of interest in what is delicate and complex; it excused to herself a narrowness of vision which we are sometimes tempted to find quite distressing. It is probably the cause of a fault that never quits her for long, a tendency to make her characters express themselves with a lyrical extravagance which sometimes comes close to the confines of rodomontade. Charlotte Brontë never arrives at that mastery of her material which permits the writer to stand apart from his work, and sway the reader with successive tides of emotion while remaining perfectly calm himself. Nor is she one of those whose visible emotion is nevertheless fugitive, like an odour, and evaporates, leaving behind it works of art which betray no personal agitation. On the contrary, her revolt, her passion, all the violence of her sensibility, are present on her written page, and we cannot read it with serenity or with a merely captious curiosity, because her own eager spirit, immortal in its active force, seems to throb beside it.

The aspect of Charlotte Brontë which I have tried to indicate to you to-day, and which I have sketched thus hastily and slightly against the background of her almost voiceless residence in Dewsbury, is far from being a complete or unique one. I offer it to you only as a single facet of her wonderful temperament, of the rich spectacle of her talent. I have ventured to propose it, because, in the multiplication of honours and attentions, the tendency to deify the human, to remove those phenomena of irregularity which are the evidence of mortal strength, grows irresistible, and we find ourselves, unconsciously, substituting a waxen bust, with azure eyes and golden hair, for the homely features which (if we could but admit it) so infinitely better match the honest stories. Let us not busy ourselves to make excuse for our austere little genius of the moors. Let us be content to take her exactly as she was, with her rebellion and her narrowness, her angers and her urgencies, perceiving that she had to be this sorrowful offspring of a poisoned world in order to clear the wells of feeling for others, and to win from emancipated generations of free souls the gratitude which is due to a precursor.

THE NOVELS OF BENJAMIN DISRAELI

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It is not easy for a man whose sovereign ambition is seen to be leading him with great success in a particular direction to obtain due credit for what he accomplishes with less manifest success in another. There is no doubt that Disraeli as an author has, at all events until very lately, suffered from the splendour of his fame as a politician. But he was an author long before he became a statesman, and it certainly is a little curious that even in his youth, although he was always commercially successful with his books, they were never, as we say, "taken seriously" by the critics. His earliest novels were largely bought, and produced a wide sensation, but they were barely accepted as contributions to literature. If we look back to the current criticism of those times, we find such a book as *Dacre*, a romance by the Countess of Morley, which is now absolutely forgotten, treated with a dignity and a consideration never accorded to *The Young Duke* or to *Henrietta Temple*. Even Disraeli's satiric squibs, in the manner of Lucian and Swift, which seem to us among the most durable ornaments of light literature in the days of William IV., were read and were laughed at, but were not critically appraised.

So, too, at the middle period of Disraeli's literary life, such books as *Coningsby* and *Tancred* were looked upon as amusing commentaries on the progress of a strenuous politician, not by any means, or by any responsible

person, as possible minor classics of our language. And at his third period, the ruling criticism of the hour was aghast at faults which now entertain us, and was blind to sterling merits which we are now ready to acknowledge. Shortly after his death, perhaps his most brilliant apologist was fain to admit that if Disraeli had been undistinguished as a speaker, his novels would have been "as the flowers of the field, charming for the day which was passing over them, and then forgotten." It is only since the beginning of the present century that a conviction has been gaining ground that some of these books were in themselves durable, not because they were the work of a man who became Prime Minister of England and made his sovereign Empress of India, but as much or as little as if they had been composed by a recluse in a hermitage. This impression has now become so general with enlightened critics that the danger seems to be that we should underrate certain excesses of rhetoric and the Corinthian mode the errors of which used to be over-emphasised, but should not, in a comparative survey of Victorian literature, be neglected as serious drawbacks to our perfect enjoyment of the high-spirited, eloquent, and ardent writings of Benjamin Disraeli. It is in this spirit of moderation that I now attempt a rapid sketch of his value as an English author.

I

There is, perhaps, no second example of a writer whose work is divided, as is that of Disraeli, into three totally distinct periods. Other authors, as for example, the poet Crabbe, and in a less marked degree Rogers, have abandoned the practice of writing for a considerable number of years, and then have resumed it. But the case of Disraeli seems to be unique as that of a man who pursued the writing of books with great ardour during three brief and indepen-

dent spaces of time. We have his first and pre-Parliamentarian period, which began with *Vivian Grey* (1826) and closed with *Venetia* (1837). We have a second epoch, opening with *Coningsby* (1844) and ending with *Tancred* (1847), during which time he was working out his political destiny; and we have the novels which he wrote after he had won the highest distinction in the State. Certain general characteristics are met with in all these three classes, but they have also differences which require to be noted and accounted for. It will, therefore, be convenient to treat them successively.

As oblivion scatters its poppy over the prose fiction of the reigns of George IV. and William IV., it becomes increasingly dangerous that criticism should take the early "fashionable" novels of Disraeli as solitary representations of literary satire or observation. It is true that to readers of to-day this class of romance is exclusively suggestive of *Vivian Grey* and its fellows, with perhaps the *Pelham* of Bulwer. But this was not the impression of the original readers of these novels, who were amused by them, but found nothing revolutionary in their treatment of society. In the course of *The Young Duke*, written in 1829, Disraeli suggests an amiable rivalry with the romances "written by my friends Mr. Ward and Mr. Bulwer." The latter name had only just risen above the horizon, but that of Plumer Ward, forgotten as it now is, was one to conjure by. Ward was the author of *Tremaine* (1825) and *De Vere* (1827), two novels of the life of a modern English gentleman, which seems to a reader to-day to be insipid and dull enough. But they contained "portraits" of public persons, they undertook to hold the mirror up to the political and fashionable world of London, and they lashed that fastidiousness which was considered to be the foible of the age.

The books of Plumer Ward, who was an accomplished personage in advancing years, were treated with marked distinction in the press, and were welcomed by critics who deigned to take little notice of even such books as *Granby* and *Dacre*. But the stories of the youthful Disraeli belonged to a class held in still less esteem than those just mentioned. They had to hold their own as best they might in rivalry with a huge flight of novels of fashionable life, all of them curiously similar in general treatment. Above these the romances of Plumer Ward rose in a sort of recognised dignity, as two peaks around which were crowded innumerable hillocks. It is necessary to recall readers of to-day, who think of *Vivian Grey* as a work of amazing novelty, to the fact that the *genre* it represents to us was one which had been lifted into high credit the year before by the consecrated success of *Tremaine*, and was at that moment cultivated by a multitude of minor novelists.

There was, however, a distinction, and it lay in the greater fund of animal spirits which Disraeli brought to his business. *Vivian Grey* was absurd, but it was fresh and popular, and it pleased at once. As the opening work of a literary career, it promised well; the impertinent young gentleman dashed off to Parnassus at a gallop. It was a bold bid for personal distinction, which the author easily perceived already to be "the only passport to the society of the great in England." *Vivian Grey* is little more than a spirited and daring boy's book; Disraeli himself called it "a hot and hurried sketch." It was a sketch of what he had never seen, yet of what he had begun to foresee with amazing lucidity. It is a sort of social fairy-tale, where every one has exquisite beauty, limitless wealth, and exalted rank, where the impossible and the hyperbolic are the only homely virtues. There has always been a tendency to exalt *Vivian Grey* at the expense of *The*

Young Duke (1831), Disraeli's next leading permanence; and, indeed, the former has had its admirers who have preferred it to all the others in this period. The difference is, however, not so marked as might be supposed. In *The Young Duke* the manner is not so burlesque, but there is the same roughness of execution, combined with the same rush and fire. In either book, what we feel to-day to be the great objection to our enjoyment is the lack of verisimilitude. Who can believe in the existence of persons whose titles are the Earl of Fitz-Pompey and Baron Deprivyseal, or whose names are Lady Aphrodite and Sir Carte Blanche? The descriptions are "high-falutin" beyond all endurance, and there is particularly noticeable a kind of stylistic foppery, which is always hovering between sublimity and a giggle.

But here is an example, from *Vivian Grey*, of Disraeli's earliest manner:—

"After a moment had passed, he was pouring forth in a rapid voice, and incoherent manner, such words as men speak only once. He spoke of his early follies, his misfortunes, his misery; of his matured views, his settled principles, his plans, his prospects, his hopes, his happiness, his bliss; and when he had ceased, he listened, in his turn, to some small still words, which made him the happiest of human beings. He bent down, he kissed the soft silken cheek which now he could call his own. Her hand was in his; her head sank upon his breast. Suddenly she clung to him with a strong clasp. 'Violet! my own, my dearest; you are overcome. I have been rash, I have been imprudent. Speak, speak, my beloved! say, you are not ill!'

"She spoke not, but clung to him with a fearful strength, her head still upon his breast, her full eyes closed. Alarmed, he raised her off the ground, and bore her to the river-side. Water might revive her. But when he tried to lay her a

moment on the bank, she clung to him gasping, as a sinking person clings to a stout swimmer. He leant over her; he did not attempt to disengage her arms; and, by degrees, by very slow degrees, her grasp loosened. At last her arms gave way and fell by her side, and her eyes partly opened.

"'Thank God! Violet, my own, my beloved, say you are better!'

"She answered not, evidently she did not know him, evidently she did not see him. A film was on her sight, and her eye was glassy. He rushed to the water-side, and in a moment he had sprinkled her temples, now covered with a cold dew. Her pulse beat not, her circulation seemed suspended. He rubbed the palms of her hands, he covered her delicate feet with his coat, and then rushing up the bank into the road, he shouted with frantic cries on all sides. No one came, no one was near. Again, with a cry of fearful anguish, he shouted as if an hyena were feeding on his vitals. No sound; no answer. The nearest cottage was above a mile off. He dared not leave her. Again he rushed down to the water-side. Her eyes were still open, still fixed. Her mouth also was no longer closed. Her hand was stiff, her heart had ceased to beat. He tried with the warmth of his own body to revive her. He shouted, he wept, he prayed. All, all in vain. Again he was in the road, again shouting like an insane being. There was a sound. Hark! It was but the screech of an owl!

"Once more at the river-side, once more bending over her with starting eyes, once more the attentive ear listening for the soundless breath. No sound! not even a sigh! Oh! what would he have given for her shriek of anguish! No change had occurred in her position, but the lower part of her face had fallen; and there was a general appearance which struck him with awe. Her body was quite cold,

her limbs stiffened. He gazed, and gazed, and gazed. He bent over her with stupor rather than grief stamped on his features. It was very slowly that the dark thought came over his mind, very slowly that the horrible truth seized upon his soul. He gave a loud shriek, and fell on the lifeless body of VIOLET FANE!"

A line in Disraeli's unfortunate tragedy of *Alarcos* pathetically admits: "Ay! ever pert is youth that baffles age!" The youth of Disraeli was "pert" beyond all record, and those who cannot endure to be teased should not turn to his early romances, or, indeed, to any of his writings. *Henrietta Temple* is the boldest attempt he ever made to tell a great consecutive story of passion, and no doubt there have been those who have palpitated over the love-at-first-sight of Ferdinand Armine and Henrietta Temple. But Disraeli's serious vein is here over-luscious; the love-passages are too emphatic and too sweet. An early critic spoke of this *dulcia vitia* of style which we meet with even in *Contarini Fleming* as the sin by which the young author was most easily beset. His attempts at serious sentiment and pompous reflection are too often deplorable, because inanimate and stilted. When he warns a heroine against an error of judgment by shouting, "'Tis the madness of the fawn who gazes with adoration on the lurid glare of the anaconda's eye," or murmurs, "Farewell, my lovely bird; I'll soon return to pillow in thy nest," we need all the stimulus of his irony and his velocity to carry us over such marshlands of cold style.

Of these imperfections, fewer are to be found in *Venetia* and fewest in *Contarini Fleming*. This beautiful romance is by far the best of Disraeli's early books, and that in which his methods at this period can be most favourably studied. A curious shadow of Disraeli himself is thrown over it all; it cannot be styled in any

direct sense an autobiography, and yet the mental and moral experiences of the author animate every chapter of it. This novel is written with far more ease and grace than any previous book of the author's, and Contarini gives a reason which explains the improvement in his creator's manner when he remarks: "I wrote with greater facility than before, because my experience of life was so much increased that I had no difficulty in making my characters think and act." *Contarini Fleming* belongs to 1831, when its writer, at the comparatively ripe age of twenty-seven, had already seen a vast deal of man and of the world of Europe.

We are not to believe the preposterous account that Contarini-Disraeli gives of his methods of composition:—

"My thoughts, my passion, the rush of my invention, were too quick for my pen. Page followed page; as a sheet was finished I threw it on the floor; I was amazed at the rapid and prolific production, yet I could not stop to wonder. In half a dozen hours I sank back exhausted, with an aching frame. I rang the bell, ordered some refreshment, and walked about the room. The wine invigorated me and warmed up my sinking fancy, which, however, required little fuel. I set to it again, and it was midnight before I retired to bed."

At this rate we may easily compute that the longest of his novels would be finished in a week. *Contarini Fleming* seems to have occupied him the greater part of a year. He liked the public to think of him, exquisitely habited, his long essenced hair falling about his eyes, flinging forth a torrent of musky and mellifluous improvisation; as a matter of fact he was a very hard worker, laborious in the arts of composition.

It is to be noted that the whole tone of *Contarini*

Fleming is intensely literary. The appeal to the intellectual, to the fastidious reader is incessant. This is an attitude always rare in English fiction, but at that epoch almost unknown, and its presence in the writings of Disraeli gives them a cachet. Under all the preposterous conversation, all the unruly turmoil of description, there runs a strong thread of entirely sober, political, and philosophical ambition. Disraeli striving with all his might to be a great poet, of the class of Byron and Goethe, a poet who is also a great mover and master of men—this is what is manifest to us throughout *Contarini Fleming*. It is almost pathetically manifest, because Disraeli—whatever else he grew to be—never became a poet. And here, too, his wonderful clairvoyance, and his command over the vagaries of his own imagination, come into play, for he never persuades himself, with all his dithyrambics, that Contarini is quite a poet.

A new influence is felt upon his style, and it is a highly beneficial one. Up to this date, Disraeli had kept Byron before him, and in his serious moments he had endeavoured to accomplish in prose what the mysterious and melancholy poet of the preceding generation had done in verse. The general effect of this Byronism, in spite of a certain buoyancy which carried the reader onwards, had been apt to be wearisome, in consequence of the monotony of effort. The fancy of the author had been too uniformly grandiose, and in the attempt to brighten it up he had sometimes passed over into positive failure. The most unyielding admirers of his early novels can hardly contradict a reader who complains that he finds the adventures of the bandits at Jonstorna insupportable and the *naïveté* of Christiana mawkish. There are pages in *Alroy* that read as if they were written for a wager, to see how much balderdash the public will endure. Disraeli seems to have been conscious of this weakness, and he tried to relieve the pompous

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gravity of his passionate scenes by episodes of irony and satire. From his earliest days these were apt to be very happy; they were inspired, especially in the squibs, by Lucian and Swift.

But in *Contarini Fleming* we detect a new flavour, and it is a very fortunate one. The bitterness of Swift was never quite in harmony with the genius of Disraeli, but the irony of Voltaire was. The effect of reading *Zadig* and *Candide* was the completion of the style of Disraeli; that "strange mixture of brilliant fantasy and poignant truth" which he rightly perceived to be the essence of the philosophic *contes* of Voltaire, finished his own intellectual education. Henceforth he does not allow his seriousness to overweigh his liveliness; if he detects a tendency to bombast, he relieves it with a brilliant jest. Count de Moltke and the lampoons offer us a case to our hand; "he was just the old fool who would make a cream cheese," says Contarini, and the startled laugh which greets him is exactly of the same order as those which were wont to reward the statesman's amazing utterances in Parliament.

In spite of a certain undeniable insipidity, the volumes of *Contarini Fleming* cannot but be read with pleasure. The mixture of Byron and Voltaire is surprising, but it produces some agreeable effects. There is a dash of Shelley in it, too, for the life on the isle of Paradise with Alcesté Contarini is plainly borrowed from *Epiphsychidion*. Disraeli does not even disdain a touch of "Monk" Lewis without his voluptuousness, and of Mrs. Radcliffe without her horrors, for he is bent on serving up an olio entirely in the taste of the day. But through it all he is conspicuously himself, and the dedication to beauty and the extraordinary intellectual exultation of such a book as *Contarini Fleming* are borrowed from no exotic source.

It is impossible to overlook the fascination which Venice

exercises over Disraeli in these early novels. Contarini's great ambition was to indite "a tale which should embrace Venice and Greece." Byron's *Life and Letters* and the completion of Rogers' *Italy* with Turner's paradisaical designs had recently awakened to its full the romantic interest which long had been gathering around "the sun-girt city." Whenever Disraeli reaches Venice his style improves, and if he mourns over her decay, his spirits rise when he has to describe her enchantments by moonlight. He reserves his most delicate effects for Greece and Venice:—

"A Grecian sunset! The sky is like the neck of a dove! the rocks and waters are bathed with a violet light. Each moment it changes; each moment it shifts into more graceful and more gleaming shadows. And the thin white moon is above all; the thin white moon, followed by a single star, like a lady by a page."

There are many passages as sumptuous as this in *Venetia*, the romance about Byron and Shelley, which Disraeli was thought indiscreet in publishing so soon after Byron's death. In the story the heroine Venetia is the daughter of Shelley (Marmion Herbert) and the bride of Byron (Lord Cadurcis). Marmion is a most melodramatic figure, but the indiscretions are not noticeable nowadays, while the courage with which the reviled and hated Shelley is described in the preface to Lord Lyndhurst as one of "the most renowned and refined spirits that have adorned these our latter days" is highly characteristic of Disraeli. The reception of Lord Cadurcis in the House of Peers and the subsequent riot in Palace Yard mark, perhaps, the highest point in direct narrative power which the novelist had yet reached; but *Venetia* was not liked, and Disraeli withdrew from literature into public life.

II

When Disraeli resumed the art of the novelist, he was no longer talking of what lay outside his experience when he touched on politics. In 1837 he had entered the House at last, as Member for Maidstone, and although his enemies roared him down on the first occasion of his rising to speak, he soon learned how to impose his voice on Parliament. In 1839 his declaration that "the rights of labour are as sacred as the rights of property" made him famous, and in 1841 he was one of Sir Robert Peel's Conservative army in the House. Then followed the formation of the Young England Party, with Disraeli as one of its leaders; these men broke away from Peel, and held that the Tory Party required stringent reform from within. It was in 1843 that Henry Thomas Hope, of Deepdene, urged, at a meeting of the Young Englanders, the expediency of Disraeli's "treating in a literary form those views and subjects which were the matter of their frequent conversations." Disraeli instantly returned to literary composition, and produced in quick succession the four books which form the second section of his work as an author; these are *Coningsby*, *Sybil*, *Tancred*, and the *Life of Lord George Bentinck*.

In this group of books we observe, in the first place, a great advance in vitality and credibility over the novels of the earlier period. Disraeli is now describing what he knows, no longer what he hopes in process of time to know. He writes from within, no longer from without the world of political action. These three novels and a biography are curiously like one another in form, and all equally make a claim to be considered not mere works of entertainment, but serious contributions to political philosophy. The assumption is borne out by the character of the books, each of which had a definite aim and purpose.

Coningsby was designed to make room for new talent in the Tory Party by an unflinching attack on the "mediocrities." In *Sybil* the heartless abuse of capital and the vices of class distinction are exposed. *Tancred* is a vision of better things to follow upon the reforms already indicated. In *Lord George Bentinck*, under the guise of a record of the struggle between Protection and Free Trade, we have a manual of personal conduct as applied to practical politics.

In all these works narrative pure and simple inclines to take a secondary place. It does so least in *Coningsby* which, as a story, is the most attractive book of Disraeli's middle period, and one of the most brilliant studies of political character ever published. The tale is interspersed with historical essays, which impede its progress but add to its weight and value. Where, however, the author throws himself into his narrative, the advance he has made in power, and particularly in truth of presentment, is very remarkable. In the early group of his novels he had felt a great difficulty in transcribing conversations so as to produce a natural and easy effect. He no longer, in *Coningsby*, is confronted by this artificiality. His dialogues are now generally remarkable for their ease and nature. The speeches of Rigby (who represents John Wilson Croker), of Lord Monmouth (who stands for Lord Hertford), of the Young Englanders themselves, of the laughable chorus of Taper and Tadpole, who never "despaired of the Commonwealth," are often extremely amusing. In *Coningsby* we have risen out of the rose-coloured mist of unreality which hung over books like *The Young Duke* and *Henrietta Temple*. The agitated gentleman whose peerage hangs in the balance, and who on hearing that the Duke of Wellington is with the King breathes out in a sigh of relief "Then there *is* a Providence," is a type of the subsidiary figure which

Disraeli had now learned to introduce with infinite lightness of irony.

Disraeli had a passion for early youth, and in almost all his books he dwells lovingly upon its characteristics. It is particularly in *Contarini Fleming* and in *Coningsby*—that is to say, in the best novels of his first and of his second period—that he lingers over the picture of schoolboy life with tenderness and sympathy. We have only to compare them, however, to see how great an advance he had made in ten years in his power of depicting such scenes. The childish dreams of Contarini are unchecked romance, and though the friendship with Musæus is drawn with delicacy and insight, and though that is an extremely pretty scene where Christiana soothes the pride of Contarini, yet a manliness and a reality are missing which we find in the wonderful Eton scenes of *Coningsby*.

Disraeli's comprehension of the feelings of half-grown ambitious boys of good family was extraordinary; and when we consider that he had never been to a public school, his picture of the life and conversation at Eton is remarkable for its fidelity to nature. The relation of the elder schoolboys to one another—a theme to which he was fond of recurring—is treated in a very adroit and natural spirit, not without a certain Dorian beauty. This preoccupation with the sentiments and passions of schoolboys was rather crudely found fault with at the time. We need have no difficulty in comprehending the pleasure he felt in watching the expansion of those youthful minds from whom he hoped for all that was to make England wise and free. The account of Coningsby's last night at Eton is one of the most deeply felt pages which Disraeli ever composed, and here it may be said that the careful avoidance of all humour—an act of self-denial which a smaller writer would not have been capable of—is justified by the dignified success of a very dangerous experiment.

The portraiture of living people is performed with the greatest good-nature. It is difficult to believe that the most sensitive and the most satirised could really be infuriated, so kindly and genial is the caricaturing. We are far here from Swift's bludgeon and from Voltaire's poisoned needle. The regeneration of the social order in England, as Disraeli dreamed it, involved the removal of some mediocrities, but he was neither angry nor impatient. The "brilliant personages who had just scampered up from Melton, thinking it probable that Sir Robert might want some moral Lords of the Bedchamber," and the Duke, who "might have acquired considerable information, if he had not in his youth made so many Latin verses," were true to their principles, and would scarcely have done more than blush faintly when he poked his fun at them. Of all the portraits none is more interesting than that of the dark, pale stranger, Sidonia, as he revealed himself to Coningsby at the inn in the forest, over the celebrated dish of "still-hissing bacon and eggs that looked like tufts of primroses." This was a figure which was to recur, and to become in the public mind almost coincident with that of Disraeli himself.

When we pass from *Coningsby* to *Sybil* we find the purely narrative interest considerably reduced in the pursuit of a scheme of political philosophy. This is of all Disraeli's novels the one which most resembles a pamphlet on a serious topic. For this reason it has never been a favourite among his works, and his lighter readers have passed it over with a glance. *Sybil*, however, is best not read at all if it is not carefully studied. In the course of *Coningsby*, that young hero had found his way to Manchester, and had discovered in it a new world, "poignant with new ideas, and suggestive of new trains of thought and feeling." His superficial observation had revealed many incongruities in our methods of manipulating wealth, and Disraeli had sketched the portrait of Mr. Jawster Sharp

with a superfluity of sarcastic wit. But it was not until somewhat later that the condition of the working-classes in our northern manufacturing districts began to attract his most serious attention. The late Duke of Rutland, that illustrious and venerable friend who alone survived in the twentieth century to bear witness to the sentiments of Young England, told me that he accompanied Disraeli on the journey which led to the composition of *Sybil*, and that he never, in long years of intimacy, saw him so profoundly moved as he was at the aspect of the miserable dwellings of the hand-loom workers.

All this is reflected on the surface of *Sybil*, and, notwithstanding curious faults in execution, the book bears the impress of a deep and true emotion. Oddly enough, the style of Disraeli is never more stilted than it is in the conversations of the poor in this story. When Gerard, the weaver, wishes to prevent the police-inspector from arresting his daughter, he remarks: "Advance and touch this maiden, and I will fell you and your minions like oxen at their pasture." Well may the serjeant answer, "You *are* a queer chap." Criticism goes further and says, "You are a chap who never walked in wynd or factory of a Yorkshire town." This want of nature, which did not extend to Disraeli's conversations among well-to-do folks, was a real misfortune, and gave *Sybil* no chance of holding its own in rivalry with such realistic studies of the depression of trade in Manchester as Mrs. Gaskell was presently to produce, nor with the ease of dialogue in Dickens' *Christmas Stories*, which were just now (in 1845) running their popular course. A happier simplicity of style, founded on a closer familiarity, would have given fresh force to his burning indignation, and have helped the cause of Devilsdust and Dandy Mick. But the accident of stilted speech must not blind us to the sincere and glowing emotion that inspired the pictures of human suffering in *Sybil*.

Then followed *Tancred*, which, as it has always been reported, continued to the last to be the author's favourite among his literary offspring. Disraeli had little sympathy with either of the great parties which in that day governed English political life. As time went on, he became surer than ever of the degeneracy of modern society, and he began to despair of discovering any cure for it.. In *Tancred* he laid aside in great measure his mood of satirical extravagance. The whole of this book is steeped in the colours of poetry—of poetry, that is to say, as the florid mind of Disraeli conceived it. It opens—as all his books love to open—with the chronicle of an ardent and innocent boy's career. This is commonplace, but when Tancred, who is mainly the author's customary type of young Englishman born in the purple, arrives in the Holy Land, a flush of pure romance passes over the whole texture of the narrative. Real life is forgotten, and we move in a fabulous, but intensely picturesque, world of ecstasy and dream.

The Prerogation of Judaism, as it had been laid down by Sidonia in *Coningsby*, is emphasised and developed, and is indeed made the central theme of the story in *Tancred*. This novel is inspired by an outspoken and enthusiastic respect for the Hebrew race and a perfect belief in its future. In the presence of the mighty monuments of Jerusalem, Disraeli forgets that he is a Christian and an ambitious member of the English Parliament. His only solicitude is to recover his privileges as a Jew, and to recollect that he stands in the majestic cradle of his race. He becomes interpenetrated with solemn mysticism; a wind of faith blows in his hair. He cries, "God never spoke except to an Arab," and we are therefore not surprised to find an actual Divine message presently pronounced in Tancred's ears as he stands on the summit of Mount Sinai. This is, perhaps, the boldest flight of imagination which occurs in the writings of Disraeli.

Tancred endeavours to counteract the purely Hebraic influences of Palestine by making a journey of homage to Astarte, a mysterious and beautiful Pagan queen—an "Aryan," as he loves to put it—who reigns in the mountains of Syria. But even she does not encourage him to put his trust in the progress of Western Europe.

Tancred is written in Disraeli's best middle style, full, sonorous, daring, and rarely swelling into bombast. It would even be too uniformly grave if the fantastic character of Facredeen did not relieve the solemnity of the discourse with his amusing tirades. Like that of all Disraeli's novels, the close of this one is dim and unsatisfactory. If there is anything that the patient reader wants to know it is how the Duke and Duchess of Bellemont behaved to the Lady of Bethany when they arrived at Jerusalem and found their son in the kiosk under her palm-tree. But this is curiosity of a class which Disraeli is not unwilling to awaken, but which he never cares to satisfy. He places the problems in a heap before us, and he leaves us to untie the knots. It is a highly characteristic trait of his mind as a writer that he is for ever preoccupied with the beginnings of things, and as little as possible with their endings.

It is not, however, from *Tancred* but from *Coningsby*, that we take our example of Disraeli's second manner :—

"Even to catch Lord Monmouth's glance was not an easy affair; he was much occupied on one side by the great lady, on the other were several gentlemen who occasionally joined in the conversation. But something must be done.

"There ran through Coningsby's character, as we have before mentioned, a vein of simplicity which was not its least charm. It resulted, no doubt, in a great degree from the earnestness of his nature. There never was a boy so totally devoid of affectation, which was remarkable, for he had a brilliant imagination, a quality that, from its fantasies, and the vague and indefinite desires it en-

genders, generally makes those whose characters are not formed, affected. The Duchess, who was a fine judge of character, and who greatly regarded Coningsby, often mentioned this trait as one which, combined with his great abilities and acquirements so unusual at his age, rendered him very interesting. In the present instance it happened that, while Coningsby was watching his grandfather, he observed a gentleman advance, make his bow, say and receive a few words and retire. This little incident, however, made a momentary diversion in the immediate circle of Lord Monmouth, and before they could all resume their former talk and fall into their previous positions, an impulse sent forth Coningsby, who walked up to Lord Monmouth, and standing before him, said,

"'How do you do, grandpapa?'

"Lord Monmouth beheld his grandson. His comprehensive and penetrating glance took in every point with a flash. There stood before him one of the handsomest youths he had ever seen, with a mien as graceful as his countenance was captivating; and his whole air breathing that freshness and ingenuousness which none so much appreciates as the used man of the world. And this was his child; the only one of his blood to whom he had been kind. It would be an exaggeration to say that Lord Monmouth's heart was touched; but his good-nature effervesced, and his fine taste was deeply gratified. He perceived in an instant such a relation might be a valuable adherent; an irresistible candidate for future elections: a brilliant tool to work out the Dukedom. All these impressions and ideas, and many more, passed through the quick brain of Lord Monmouth ere the sound of Coningsby's words had seemed to cease, and long before the surrounding guests had recovered from the surprise which they had occasioned them, and which did not diminish, when Lord Monmouth, advancing, placed his arms round Coningsby with a dignity of affection that

would have become Louis XIV., and then, in the high manner of the old Court, kissed him on each cheek.

"'Welcome to your home,' said Lord Monmouth. 'You have grown a great deal.'

"Then Lord Monmouth led the agitated Coningsby to the great lady, who was a Princess and an Ambassadress, and then, placing his arm gracefully in that of his grandson, he led him across the room, and presented him in due form to some royal blood that was his guest, in the shape of a Russian Grand Duke. His Imperial Highness received our hero as graciously as the grandson of Lord Monmouth might expect; but no greeting can be imagined warmer than the one he received from the lady with whom the Grand Duke was conversing. She was a dame whose beauty was mature, but still radiant. Her figure was superb; her dark hair crowned with a tiara of curious workmanship. Her rounded arm was covered with costly bracelets, but not a jewel on her finely-formed bust, and the least possible rouge on her still oval cheek. Madame Colonna retained her charms."

III

Nearly a quarter of a century passed, during which Disraeli slowly rose to the highest honours in the State. Lord Derby died, and the novelist, already Leader of the House of Commons, found himself called to be Prime Minister of England. His first administration, however, was brief, and in the last days of 1868 he resigned in favour of Mr. Gladstone. The Liberals were in for five years, and Disraeli, in opposition, found a sort of tableland stretch in front of him after so much arduous climbing. It was at this moment, shortly after the resignation of the Tory Minister, that the publisher of a magazine approached him with the request that he would write a novel to appear in its pages. He was offered, it is said, a sum

of money far in excess of what any one, at that time, had ever received for "serial rights." Disraeli refused the offer, but it may have drawn his thoughts back to literature, and in the course of 1869, after the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland was completed, he found time to write what is unquestionably the greatest of his literary works—the superb ironic romance of *Lothair*.

Eminent as he was and eminently successful, Disraeli was far, in 1870, from having conquered public opinion in England. The reception of his new novel was noisy, and enjoyed to the full the clamours of advertisement, but it was not favourable. The critics laughed it to scorn, and called it a farce and a failure. The *Quarterly Review*, in the course of a savage diatribe, declared that it was "as dull as ditch-water and as flat as a flounder," and in a graver mood reproved it as a mere "bid for the bigoted voices of Exeter Hall." Some of the criticisms were not wanting in acumen. It was perceived at once that, as Theodora Campion is the heroine of the book, it was an error in art to kill her off in the middle of it. Moreover, it is only fair to admit that if the stormy Parliamentarian life Disraeli had led so long had given him immense personal advantages, it had also developed some defects. It had taught him boundless independence and courage, it had given him a rare experience of men and manners, and it had lifted his satire far above petty or narrow personal considerations. But it had encouraged a looseness of utterance, a mixture of the colloquial and the bombastic, which was unfortunate. In the best parts of *Coningsby* and of *Tancred* he had shown himself a very careless writer of English. But *Lothair*, even in its corrected form—and the first edition is a miracle of laxity—is curiously incorrect. It reads as though it were taken down from the flowing speech of a fine orator, not as though it were painfully composed in a study; it contains surprising ellipses, strange freaks of grammar. There was all this, and more,

to encourage the critics, whom Disraeli had gone out of his way to affront in a violent epigram, to attack *Lothair* with contempt and resentment.

The critics took irony for timidity; they thought that the sardonic novelist was the dupe of the splendours which he invented and gloated over. But if one thing is more evident than another to-day it is that this gorgeous story of a noble boy, whose guardians, a Presbyterian earl and a Roman cardinal, quarrelled for his soul and for his acres, is an immense satire from first to last. In Disraeli's own words, used in another sense, the keynote of *Lothair* is "mockery blended with Ionian splendour." Never had he mocked so dauntlessly, never had his fancy been more exuberant, and those who criticise the magnificence must realise that it was intentional. It was thus that Disraeli loved to see life, and, most of all, the life he laughed at. He had always been gorgeous, but he let himself go in *Lothair*; all is like the dream of a Lorenzo dei Medicis or an Aurungzebe. Nothing is done by halves. Muriel Towers was set on "the largest natural lake that inland England boasts"—some lake far larger than Windermere and entirely unsuspected by geographers. This piece of water is studded with "green islands," which is natural. But the author cannot stay his hand: this largest of the English lakes is also alive with "golden gondolas," which are rarer objects. In one of the odd little flashes of self-criticism which illuminate the book Lothair says of a certain northern garden, with its fanes and its fountains, its glittering statues and its Babylonian terraces, that there are "perhaps too many temples."

There are perhaps too many temples in the landscape of *Lothair*, but they were put in on purpose. The splendour is part of the satire. When the hero has ordered an architect to make some plans for a building, the door opens and servants enter bearing "a large and magnificent portfolio of morocco, made of prelatial purple with broad bands

of gold and alternate ornaments of a cross and a coronet." It is the sort of portfolio that Belshazzar might have used, but no English master-builder since time began ever launched forth into such splendour. This is characteristic of Disraeli and of his book; it pleased him to wrap all his fancies in jewelled cloth of gold. He chose that the world should consist of nothing but Tudor palaces in colossal parks, and that time should be no other than a perpetual Holy Week of golden ceremonial. He knew his public, and that it adored these follies. He spoke to them in the language that they loved, but in a tone of the most seraphical disdain and irony.

What marks the whole of Disraeli's writings more than any other quality is the buoyant and radiant temperament of their author. In *Lothair* he is like an inspired and enfranchised boy, set free from all the trammels of reality, and yet bringing to the service of his theme the results of an extraordinary inherited experience. If the picture is not real, we may take courage to say that it is far better than reality—more rich, more entertaining, more intoxicating. We have said that it is carelessly written, but that is part of the author's superb self-confidence, and when he is fortunately inspired, he obtains here an ease of style, a mastery which he had never found before. The sureness of his touch is seen in the epigrams which strew the pages of *Lothair*, and have become part of our habitual speech—the phrase about eating "a little fruit on a green bank with music"; that which describes the hansom cab, "'Tis the gondola of London." This may lead us on to the consideration that Disraeli is one of those who have felt most vividly and expressed most gaily the peculiar physical beauty of London. He saw the Park as the true Londoner sees it—when "the chestnuts are in silver bloom, and the pink may has flushed the thorns, and banks of sloping turf are radiant with plots of gorgeous flowers; when the water glitters in the sun, and the air is fragrant with that spell

which only can be found in metropolitan mignonette." He describes as no one else has ever done with equal mastery a stately and successful house-party in a great country mansion. He had developed, when he composed *Lothair*, a fuller sense of beauty than he had ever possessed before, but it revelled in forms that were partly artificial and partly fabulous. An example of these forms may now be welcome:—

"Mr. Giles took an early easy opportunity of apprising Lady Farringford that she had nearly met Cardinal Grandison at dinner, and that his Eminence would certainly pay his respects to Mrs. Putney Giles in the evening. As Lady Farringford was at present a high ritualist, and had even been talked of as 'going to Rome,' this intelligence was stunning, and it was observed that her Ladyship was unusually subdued during the whole of the second course.

"On the right of Lothair sate the wife of a Vice-Chancellor, a quiet and pleasing lady, to whom Lothair, with natural good breeding, paid snatches of happy attention, when he could for a moment with propriety withdraw himself from the blaze of Apollonia's coruscating conversation. Then there was a rather fierce-looking Red Ribbon, medalled as well as be-starred, and the Red Ribbon's wife, with a blushing daughter, in spite of her parentage not yet accustomed to stand fire. A partner and his unusually numerous family had the pleasure also of seeing Lothair for the first time, and there were no less than four M.P.'s, one of whom was even in office.

"Apollonia was stating to Lothair, with brilliant perspicuity, the reasons which quite induced her to believe that the Gulf Stream had changed its course, and the political and social consequences that might accrue.

"'The religious sentiment of the Southern races must be wonderfully affected by a more rigorous climate,' said Apollonia. 'I cannot doubt,' she continued, 'that a series of severe winters at Rome might put an end to Romanism.'

"'But is there any fear that a reciprocal influence might be exercised on the Northern nations?' inquired Lothair. 'Would there be any apprehension of our Protestantism becoming proportionately relaxed?'

"'Of course not,' said Apollonia. 'Truth cannot be affected by climate. Truth is truth alike in Palestine and Scandinavia.'

"'I wonder what the Cardinal would think of this,' said Lothair, 'who, you tell me, is coming to you this evening.'

"'Yes, I am most interested to see him, though he is the most puissant of our foes. Of course he would take refuge in sophistry; and science, you know, they deny.'

"'Cardinal Grandison is giving some lectures on science,' said the Vice-Chancellor's lady, quietly.

"'It is remorse,' said Apollonia. 'Their clever men can never forget that unfortunate affair of Galileo, and think they can divert the indignation of the nineteenth century by mock zeal about red sandstone or the origin of species.'

"'And are you afraid of the Gulf Stream?' inquired Lothair of his calmer neighbour.

"'I think we want more evidence of a change. The Vice-Chancellor and I went down to a place we have near town on Saturday, where there is a very nice piece of water; indeed, some people call it a lake; it was quite frozen, and my boys wanted to skate, but that I would not permit.'

"'You believe in the Gulf Stream to that extent,' said Lothair; 'no skating.'

"The Cardinal came early; the ladies had not long left the dining-room. They were agitated when his name was announced; even Apollonia's heart beat; but then that might be accounted for by the inopportune recollection of an occasional correspondence with Caprera.

"Nothing could exceed the simple suavity with which the Cardinal appeared, approached, and greeted them. He thanked Apollonia for her permission to pay his respects

to her, which he had long wished to do; and then they were all presented, and he said exactly the right thing to every one."

Disraeli began his career, as I have pointed out in the earlier part of this essay, as a purveyor of entertainment to the public in a popular and not very dignified kind. He contended with the crowd of fashionable novelists whose books consoled the leisure of Mrs. Wititterly as she reclined on the drawing-room sofa. He found rivals in Bulwer and Mrs. Gore, and a master in Plumer Ward. His brilliant stories sold, but at first they won him little advantage. Slowly, by dint of his inherent force of genius, his books have not merely survived their innumerable fellows, but they have come to represent to us the form and character of a whole school; nay, more, they have come to take the place in our memories of a school which, but for them, would have utterly passed away and been forgotten. Disraeli, accordingly, is unique, not merely because his are the only fashionable novels of the pre-Victorian era which any one ever reads nowadays, but because in his person that ineffable manner of the "thirties" reaches an isolated sublimity and finds a permanent place in literature. But if we take a still wider view of the literary career of Disraeli, we are bound to perceive that the real source of the interest which his brilliant books continue to possess is the evidence their pages reveal of the astonishing personal genius of the man. Do what we will, we find ourselves looking beyond Contarini Fleming and Sidonia and Vivian Grey to the adventurous Jew who, by dint of infinite resolution and an energy which never slept, conquered all the prejudices of convention, and trod English society beneath his foot in the triumphant irony of success. It is the living Disraeli who is always more salient than the most fascinating of his printed pages.

THREE EXPERIMENTS IN PORTRAITURE

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I

LADY DOROTHY NEVILL

An Open Letter

Dear Lady Burghclere,

When we met for the first time after the death of our friend, you desired me to produce what you were kind enough to call "one of my portraits." But the art of the portrait-writer is capricious, and at that time I felt wholly disinclined for the adventure. I excused myself on the ground that the three thick volumes of her reminiscences made a further portrait needless, and I reflected, though I did not say, that the difficulties of presenting the evanescent charm and petulant wit of Lady Dorothy were insuperable. I partly think so still, but your command has lingered in my memory all these months, and I have determined to attempt to obey you, although what I send you can be no "portrait," but a few leaves torn out of a painter-writer's sketch-book.

The existence of the three published volumes does, after all, not preclude a more intimate study, because they are confessedly exterior. They represent what she saw and heard, not what others perceived in her. In the first place, they are very much better written than she would have written them herself. I must dwell presently on the curious

fact that, with all her wit, she possessed no power of sustained literary expression. Her Memoirs were composed, as you know, by Mr. Ralph Nevill, who is a practised writer, and not otherwise could they have been given to the public. On this point her own evidence is explicit. She wrote to me, in all the excitement of the success of the volume of 1906: "The Press has been wonderfully good to my little efforts, but to Ralph the better part is due, as, out of the tangled remnants of my brain, he extracted these old anecdotes of my early years." This is as bravely characteristic of her modesty as it is of her candour, but I think it shows that there is still room for some record of the more intimate features of her charming and elusive character. I take up my pencil, but with little hope of success, since no more formidable task could be set me. I will at least try to be, as she would have scorned me for not being, sincere.

My friendship with Lady Dorothy Nevill occupied more than a quarter of a century. I met her first in the house of Sir Redvers and Lady Audrey Buller in the winter of 1887, soon after their return from Ireland. She had done me the great honour of desiring that I should be invited to meet her. She had known my venerable relative, the zoologist, Thomas Bell of Selborne, and she had corresponded in years long past, about entomology, with my father. We talked together on that first occasion for hours, and it seems to me that I was lifted, without preliminaries, into her intimacy. From that afternoon, until I drank tea with her for the last time, ten days before her death, the precious link was never loosened.

In 1887, her great social popularity had not begun. She was, I now know, already near sixty, but it never occurred to me to consider her age. She possessed a curious static quality, a perennial youthfulness. Every one must have observed how like Watts' picture of her at twenty she still was at eighty-six. This was not preserved by any arts

or fictile graces. She rather affected, prematurely, the dress and appearance of an elderly woman. I remember her as always the same, very small and neat, very pretty with her chiselled nose, the fair oval of her features, the slightly ironic, slightly meditative smile, the fascinating colour of the steady eyes, beautifully set in the head, with the eyebrows rather lifted as in a perpetual amusement of curiosity. Her head, slightly sunken into the shoulders, was often poised a little sideways, like a bird's that contemplates a hemp-seed. She had no quick movements, no gestures; she held herself very still. It always appeared to me that, in face of her indomitable energy and love of observation, this was an unconscious economy of force. It gave her a very peculiar aspect; I remember once frivolously saying to her that she looked as though she were going to "pounce" at me; but she never pounced. When she had to move, she rose energetically and moved with determination, but she never wasted a movement. Her physical strength—and she such a tiny creature—seemed to be wonderful. She was seldom unwell, although, like most very healthy people, she bewailed herself with exaggerated lamentations whenever anything was the matter with her. But even on these occasions she defied what she called "coddling." Once I found her suffering from a cold, on a very chilly day, without a fire, and I expostulated. She replied, with a sort of incongruity very characteristic of her, "Oh! none of your hot bottles for me!" In her last hours of consciousness she battled with the doctor's insistence that she must have a fire in her bedroom, and her children had to conceal the flame behind screens because she threatened to get out of bed and put it out. Her marvellous physical force has to be insisted on, for it was the very basis of her character.

Her humorous petulance, her little sharp changes of voice, the malice of her downcast eyes, the calmness of her demure and easy smile—how is any impression to be given of things

so fugitive? Her life, which had not been without its troubles and anxieties, became one of prolonged and intense enjoyment. I think that this was the main reason of the delight which her company gave to almost every one. She was like a household blaze upon a rainy day, one stretched out one's hands to be warmed. She guarded herself against the charge of being amiable. "It would be horrid to be amiable," she used to say, and, indeed, there was always a touch of sharpness about her. She was amused once because I told her she was like an acidulated drop, half sweet and half sour. "Oh! any stupid woman can be sweet," she said, "it's often another name for imbecile."

She had curious little prejudices and antipathies. I never fathomed the reason of her fantastic horror of the feasts of the Church, particularly of Christmas. She always became curiously agitated as the month of December waned. In her notes she inveighed, in quaint alarm, against the impending "Christmas pains and penalties." I think she disliked the disturbance of social arrangements which these festivals entailed. But there was more than that. She was certainly a little superstitious, in a mocking, eighteenth-century sort of way, as Madame du Deffand might have been. She constantly said, and still more frequently wrote, "D.V." after any project, even of the most frivolous kind. The idea was that one should be polite all round, in case of any contingency. When she was in the Riviera, she was much interested to hear that the Prince of Monaco had built and endowed a handsome church at Monte Carlo. "Very clever of him," she said, "for you never can tell."

Lady Dorothy's entire absence of affectation was eminently attractive. She would be mistress of herself, though China fell. Her strange little activities, her needlework, her paperwork, her collections, were the wonder of everybody, but she did not require approval; she adopted them,

in the light of day, for her own amusement. She never pushed her peculiarities on the notice of visitors, but, at the same time, if discovered in the act of some incredible industry, she went on with it calmly. When she was in Heidelberg in 1892 and successive years, what interested her was the oddity of the students' life; she expatiated to me on their beer and their sabre-cuts. Whenever I went abroad of late years, I was exhorted to send her picture post-cards from out-of-the-way places, and "Remember that I like vulgar ones best," she added imperturbably. The story is perhaps known to you of how, in a circle of superfine ladies, the conversation turned to food, and the company outdid one another in protestations of delicacy. This one could only touch a little fruit, and that one was practically confined to a cup of tea. Lady Dorothy, who had remained silent and detached, was appealed to as to her opinion. In a sort of loud cackling—a voice she sometimes surprisingly adopted—she replied, "Oh, give me a blow-out of tripe and onions!" to the confusion of the *précieuses*. She had a wholesome respect for food, quite orthodox and old-fashioned, although I think she ate rather markedly little. But she liked that little good. She wrote to me once from Cannes, "This is not an intellectual place, but then the body rejoices in the cooking, and thanks God for that." She liked to experiment in foods, and her guests sometimes underwent strange surprises. One day she persuaded old Lord Wharncliffe, who was a great friend of hers, to send her a basket of guinea-pig, and she entertained a very distinguished company on a fricassee of this unusual game. She refused to say what the dish was until every one had heartily partaken, and then Mr. George Russell turned suddenly pale and fled from the room. "Nothing but fancy," remarked the hostess, composedly. When several years ago there was a proposal that we should feed upon horse-flesh, and a purveyor of that dainty opened a shop in

Mayfair, Lady Dorothy was one of the first of his customers. She sallied forth in person, followed by a footman with a basket, and bought a joint in the presence of a jeering populace.

She had complete courage and absolute tolerance. Sometimes she pretended to be timid or fanatical, but that was only her fun. Her toleration and courage would have given her a foremost place among philanthropists or social reformers, if her tendencies had been humanitarian. She might have been another Elizabeth Fry, another Florence Nightingale. But she had no impulse whatever towards active benevolence, nor any interest in masses of men and women. And, above all, she was not an actor, but a spectator in life, and she evaded, often with droll agility, all the efforts which people made to drag her into propagandas of various kinds. She listened to what they had to say, and she begged for the particulars of specially awful examples of the abuses they set out to remedy. She was all sympathy and interest, and the propagandist started with this glittering ally in tow; but he turned, and where was she? She had slipped off, and was in contemplation of some other scheme of experience.

She described her life to me, in 1901, as a "treadmill of friendship, perpetually on the go"; and later she wrote: "I am hampered by perpetual outbursts of hospitality in every shape." Life was a spectacle to her, and society a congeries of little *guignols*, at all of which she would fain be seated, in a front stall. If she complained that hospitality "hampered" her, it was not that it interfered with any occupation or duty, but simply that she could not eat luncheon at three different houses at once. I remember being greatly amused when I congratulated her on having enjoyed some eminent public funeral, by her replying, grudgingly: "Yes—but I lost another most interesting ceremony through its being at the same hour." She grum-

bled: "People are tugging me to go and see things," not from any shyness of the hermit or reluctance to leave her home, but simply because she would gladly have yielded to them all. "Such a nuisance one can't be in two places at once, like a bird!" she remarked to me.

In this relation, her attitude to country life was droll. After long indulgence in her amazing social energy in London, she would suddenly become tired. The phenomenon never ceased to surprise her; she could not recollect that she had been tired before, and this must be the end of all things. She would fly to the country; to Dorsetshire, to Norfolk, to Haslemere, to what she called "the soberness of Ascot." Then would come letters describing the bliss of rural calm. "Here I am! Just in time to save my life. For the future, no clothes and early hours." That lasted a very short while. Then a letter signed "Your recluse, D. N.," would show the dawn of a return to nature. Then *boutades* of increasing vehemence would mark the rising impatience. Sept 12: "How dreadful it is that the country is so full of ladies." Sept. 15: "I am surrounded by tall women and short women, all very tiresome." Sept. 20: "So dull here, except for one pleasant episode of a drunken housemaid." Sept. 23: "Oh! I am so longing for the flesh-pots of dear dirty old London"; and then one knew that her return to Charles Street would not be long delayed. She was very fond indeed of country life, for a short time, and she was interested in gardens, but she really preferred streets. "Eridge is such a paradise—especially the quadrupeds," she once wrote to me from a house in which she found peculiar happiness. But she liked bipeds best.

However one may postpone the question, sooner or later it is necessary to consider the quality of Lady Dorothy Nevill's wit, since all things converge in her to that. But her wit is so difficult to define that it is not surprising that

one avoids, as long as possible, coming actually to grips with it. We may lay the foundation of a formula, perhaps, by saying that it was a compound of solid good sense and an almost reckless whimsicality of speech. The curious thing about it was that it was not markedly intellectual, and still less literary. It had not the finish of such wit as is preserved in anthologies of humour. Every one who enjoyed the conversation of Lady Dorothy must have perceived with annoyance how little he could take away with him. Her phrases did not often recur to please that inward ear, "which is the bliss of solitude." What she said seemed at the time to be eminently right and sane; it was exhilarating to a high degree; it was lighted up by merriment, and piquancy, and salt; but it was the result of a kind of magic which needed the wand of the magician; it could not be reproduced by an imitator. It is very unfortunate, but the fact has to be faced. When we tell our grandchildren that Lady Dorothy Nevill was the finest female wit of her age, they will ask us for examples of her talent, and we shall have very few to give.

She liked to discuss people better than books or politics or principles, although she never shrank from these. But it was what she said about human beings that kept her interlocutors hanging on her lips. She made extraordinarily searching strictures on persons, without malice, but without nonsense of any kind. Her own favourites were treated with reserve in this respect: it was as though they were put in a pen by themselves, not to be criticised so long as they remained in favour; and she was not capricious, was, on the contrary, conspicuously loyal. But they always had the impression that it was only by special licence that they escaped the criticism that every one else was subjected to. Lady Dorothy Nevill was a stringent observer, and no respecter of persons. She carried a bow, and shot at folly as it flew. But I particularly wish to insist on the fact

that her arrows, though they were feathered, were not poisoned.

Light was thrown on the nature of Lady Dorothy's wit by her correspondence. She could in no accepted sense be called a good letter-writer, although every now and then brilliantly amusing phrases occurred in her letters. I doubt whether she ever wrote one complete epistle; her correspondence consisted of tumultuous, reckless, sometimes extremely confused and incorrect notes, which, however, repeated—for those who knew how to interpret her language—the characteristics of her talk. She took no pains with her letters, and was under no illusion about their epistolary value. In fact, she was far too conscious of their lack of form, and would sign them, "Your incompetent old friend"; there was generally some apology for "this ill-written nonsense," or "what stuff this is, not worth your reading!" She once wrote to me: "I should like to tell you all about it, but alas! old Horace Walpole's talent has not descended on me." Unfortunately, that was true; so far as literary expression and the construction of sentences went, it had not. Her correspondence could never be given to the world, because it would need to be so much revised and expanded and smoothed out that it would no longer be hers at all.

Nevertheless, her reckless notes were always delightful to receive, because they gave the person to whom they were addressed a reflection of the writer's mood at the moment. They were ardent and personal, in their torrent of broken sentences, initials, mis-spelt names and nouns that had dropped their verbs. They were not so good as her talk, but they were like enough to it to be highly stimulating and entertaining; and in the course of them phrases would be struck out, like sparks from flint, which were nearly as good, and of the very same quality, as the things she used to say. She wrote her letters on a fantastic variety of strangely

coloured paper, pink and blue and snuff-brown, violet and green and grey, paper that was stamped with patterns like a napkin, or frilled like a lace handkerchief, or embossed with forget-me-nots like a child's valentine. She had tricks of time-saving; always put "1" for "one," and "x" for "cross," a word which she, who was never cross, loved to use. "I did not care for any of the guests; we seemed to live in a storm of x questions and crooked answers," she would write, or "I am afraid my last letter was rather x."

Lady Dorothy, as a letter-writer, had no superstitious reverence for the parts of speech. Like M. Bergeret, she "se moquait de l'orthographie comme une chose méprisable." The spelling in her tumultuous notes threw a light upon that of very fine ladies in the seventeenth century. She made no effort to be exact, and much of her correspondence was made obscure by initials, which she expected her friends to interpret by divination. From a withering denunciation of the Government she expressly excepts Mr. John Burns and "that much-abused Mr. Birhell, whom I like." From about 1899 to 1903, I think that Lord Wolseley was the friend who occupied most of her thoughts. In her letters of those years the references to him are incessant, but when he is not "the F.M." and "our C.C.," she rings the changes on all possible forms of his name, from "Wollesley" to "Walsey." When she wrote to me of the pleasure she had had in meeting "the Abbot Guaschet," it took me a moment to recognise the author of *English Monastic Life*. She would laugh herself at her spelling, and would rebut any one who teased her about it by saying, "Oh! What does it matter? I don't pretend to be a bright specimen—like you!" When she made arrangements to come to see me at the House of Lords, which she frequently did, she always wrote it "the Lord's House," as though it were a conventicle.

One curious observation which the recipient of hundreds

of her notes is bound to make, is the remarkable contrast between the general tone of them and the real disposition of their writer. Lady Dorothy Nevill in person was placid, indulgent, and calm; she never raised her voice, or challenged an opinion, or asserted her individuality. She played, very consistently, her part of the amused and attentive spectator in the theatre of life. But in her letters she pretended to be, or supposed herself called upon to seem, passionate and distracted. They are all twinkling with humorous or petulant exaggeration. She happens to forget an engagement, which was of no sort of importance, and this is how she apologises :—

"To think that every hour since you said you would come I have repeated to myself—Gosse at 5, Gosse at 5, and then after all to go meandering off and leaving you to cuss and swear on the doorstep, and you will never come again now, really. No punishment here or hereafter will be too much for me. Lead me to the Red Hill Asylum, and leave me there."

This was written nearly twenty years ago, and she was not less vivacious until the end. Lord Lansdowne tells me of an anonymous letter which he once received, to which she afterwards pleaded guilty. A cow used to be kept at the back of Lansdowne House, and the animal, no doubt feeling lonely, was in the habit of lowing at all sorts of hours. The letter, which was supposed to voice the complaint of the neighbours in Charles Street, was couched in the broadest Wiltshire dialect, and ended with the postscript: "Dang 'un, there 'ee goes again!" As a matter of fact, her letters, about which she had no species of vanity or self-consciousness, were to her merely instruments of friendship. There was an odd mingling of affection and stiffness in them. She marshalled her acquaintances with them, and almost invariably they were concerned with arrangements for meeting or explanations of absence. In my own experience,

I must add that she made an exception when her friends were abroad, when she took considerable pains to tell them the gossip, often in surprising terms. I was once regaled with her experiences as the neighbour of a famous African magnate, and with the remark, "Mrs. ——," a London fine lady of repute, "has been here, and has scraped the whole inside out of Mr. ——, and gone her way rejoicing." Nor did she spare the correspondent himself:—

"Old Dr. —— has been here, and tells me he admires you very much; but I believe he has lost his memory, and he never had good taste at any time."

This was not a tribute which self-esteem could hug to its bosom. Of a very notorious individual she wrote to me:—

"I thought I should never be introduced to him, and I had to wait 100 years, but everything is possible in the best of worlds, and he was very satisfactory at last." Satisfactory! No word could be more characteristic on the pen of Lady Dorothy. To be "satisfactory," whether you were the President of the French Republic or Lord Wolseley or the Human Elephant (a pathetic freak in whom she took a great interest), was to perform on the stage of life, in her unruffled presence, the part which you had been called upon by Providence to fill. Even a criminal might be "satisfactory" if he did his job thoroughly. The only entirely unsatisfactory people were those who were insipid, conventional, and empty. "The first principle of society should be to extinguish the bores," she once said. I remember going with her to the Zoo in 1898, and being struck with a remark which she made, not because it was important, but because it was characteristic. We were looking at the wolves, which she liked; and then, close by, she noticed some kind of Indian cow. "What a bore for the wolves to have to live opposite a cow!" and then, as if talking to herself, "I do hate a ruminant!"

Her relations to literature, art, and science were specta-

cular also. She was a sympathetic and friendly onlooker, always on the side of those things against the Philistines, but not affecting special knowledge herself. She was something of a virtuoso. She once said, "I have a passion for reading, but on subjects which nobody else will touch," and this indicated the independence of her mind. She read to please herself, and to satisfy her thirst for experience. When our friendship began, Zola was in the act of producing the tremendous series of his Rougon-Macquart novels. It was one of our early themes of conversation. Zola was then an object of shuddering horror to the ordinary English reader. Lady Dorothy had already read *L'Assommoir*, and had not shrunk from it; so I ventured to tell her of *La Terre*, which was just appearing. She wrote to me about it: "I have been reading Zola. He takes the varnish off rural life, I must say. Oh! these horrid demons of Frenchmen know how to write. Even the most disgusting things they know how to describe poetically. I wish Zola could describe Haslemere with all the shops shut, rain falling, and most of the inhabitants in their cups." She told me later—for we followed our Zola to *Lourdes* and *Paris*—that some young Oxford prig saw *La Bête Humaine* lying on the table at Charles Street, and remarked that Lady Dorothy could surely not be aware that that was "no book for a lady." She said, "I told him it was just the book for me!"

She read Disraeli's novels over again, from time to time, with a renewal of sentiment. "I am dedicating my leisure hours to *Endymion*. What a charm after the beef and mutton of ordinary novels!" She gradually developed a cult for Swinburne, whom she had once scorned; in her repentance after his death, she wrote: "I never hear enough about that genius Swinburne! My heart warms when I think of him and read his poems." I think she was very much annoyed that he had never been a visitor at Charles Street. When Verlaine was in England, to deliver a

lecture, in 1894, Lady Dorothy was insistent that, as I was seeing him frequently, I should bring the author of *Parallèlement* to visit her. She said—I think under some illusion —"Verlaine is one of my pet poets, though," she added, "not of this world." I was obliged to tell her that neither Verlaine's clothes, nor his person, nor his habits, admitted of his being presented in Mayfair, and that, indeed, it was difficult to find a little French eating-house in Soho where he could be at home. She then said: "Why can't you take me to see him in this eating-house?" I had to explain that of the alternatives that was really the least possible. She was not pleased.

Nor am I pleased with this attempt of mine to draw the features of our wonderful fairy friend. However I may sharpen the pencil, the line it makes is still too heavy. I feel that these anecdotes seem to belie her exquisite refinement, the rapidity and delicacy of her mental movement. To tell them is like stroking the wings of a moth. Above all, it is a matter of despair to attempt to define her emotional nature. Lady Dorothy Nevill was possessed neither of gravity nor of pathos; she was totally devoid of sentimentality. This made it easy for a superficial observer to refuse to believe that the author of so many pungent observations and such apparently volatile cynicism had a heart. When this was once questioned in company, one who knew her well replied: "Ah! yes, she has a heart, and it is like a grain of mustard-seed!" But her kindliness was shown, with great fidelity, to those whom she really honoured with her favour. I do not know whether it would be strictly correct to say that she had the genius of friendship, because that supposes a certain initiative and action which were foreign to Lady Dorothy's habits. But she possessed, to a high degree, the genius of comradeship. She held the reins very tightly, and she let no one escape whom she wished to retain. She took immense pains to preserve her friend-

ships, and indeed became, dear creature, a little bit tyrannical at last. Her notes grew to be excessively emphatic. She would begin a letter quite cheerfully with "Oh, you demon!" or complain of "total and terrible neglect of an old friend; I could fill this sheet of paper with an account of your misdeeds!" She was ingenious in reproach: "I cannot afford to waste penny after penny, and no assets forthcoming," or "I have only two correspondents, and one of them is a traitor; I therefore cease to write to you for ever!" This might sound formidable, but it was only one of the constant surprises of her humour, and would be followed next day by the most placable of notelets.

Her curiosity with regard to life spread to her benevolences, which often took somewhat the form of voyages of discovery. Among these her weekly excursion to the London Hospital, in all weathers and in every kind of cheap conveyance, was prominent. I have to confess that I preferred that a visit to her should not be immediately prefaced by one of these adventures among the "pore dear things" at the hospital, because that was sure to mean the recital of some gruesome operation she had heard of, or the details of some almost equally gruesome cure. She enjoyed the whole experience in a way which is blank to the professional humanitarian, but I suspect the "pore dear things" appreciated her listening smile and sympathetic worldliness much more than they would have done the admonitions of a more conscious philanthropist.

And, indeed, in retrospect, it is her kindliness that shines forth. She followed all that her friends did, everything that happened to those who were close to them. She liked always to receive the tribute of what she called my "literary efforts," and was ruthlessly sharp in observing announcements of them: "Publishing again, and of course no copy for poor old me," when not a volume had yet left the binders. She took up absurd little phrases with delightful *camaraderie;*

I have forgotten why at one time she took to signing herself "Your Koh-i-Noor," and wrote: "If I can hope to be the Koh-i-Noor of Mrs. Gosse's party, I shall be sure to come on Monday." One might go on indefinitely reviving these memories of her random humour and kindly whimsicality. But I close on a word of tenderer gravity, which I am sure will affect you. She had been a little tyrannical, as usual, and perhaps thought the tone of her persiflage rather excessive; a few hours later came a second note, which began: "You have made my life happier for me these last years—you, and Lady Airlie, and dearest Winifred." From her who never gave way to sentimentality in any form, and who prided herself on being as rigid as a nut-cracker, this was worth all the protestations of some more ebullient being. And there, dear Lady Burghclere, I must leave this poor sketch for such approval as you can bring yourself to give it.

Very faithfully yours,
EDMUND GOSSE.

January 1914.

II

LORD CROMER AS A MAN OF LETTERS

IN the obituary notices which attended the death of Lord Cromer, it was necessary and proper that almost the whole space at the command of the writers should be taken up by a sketch of his magnificent work as an administrator, or, as the cant phrase goes, "an empire-builder." For thirty years, during which time he advanced to be one of the most powerful and efficient of proconsuls, he held a place in the political world which arrested the popular imagination, and must continue to outweigh all other aspects of his character. Of this side of Lord Cromer's splendid

career I am not competent to say a word. But there was another facet of it, one more private and individual, which became prominent after his retirement, I mean his intellectual and literary activity, which I had the privilege of observing. It would be a pity, perhaps, to let this be wholly submerged, and I propose to give, from my own recollection, some features of it. Lord Cromer was the author of six or seven published volumes, but these are before the public, and it is needless to speak much about them. What may be found more interesting are a few impressions of his attitude towards books and towards ideas.

On the first occasion on which I met him, he was characteristic. It was some fifteen years ago, at the time when the brilliant young politicians who called themselves (or were rather ineptly called) the Hooligans had the graceful habit of asking some of their elders to dine with them in a private room of the House of Commons. At one of these little dinners the only guests were Lord Cromer and myself. I had never seen him before, and I regarded him with some awe and apprehension, but no words had passed between us, when the division-bell rang, and our youthful hosts darted from the room.

The moment we were left alone, Lord Cromer looked across the deserted tablecloth and said quietly, as though he were asking me to pass the salt, "Where is Bipontium?" I was driven by sheer fright into an exercise of intelligence, and answered at once, "I should think it must be the Latin for Zweibrücken. Why?" "Oh! I saw this afternoon that my edition of Diodorus Siculus was printed *ex typographia societatis Bipontinæ*, and I couldn't imagine for the life of me what 'Bipontium' was. No doubt you're quite right." Nothing could be more characteristic of Lord Cromer's habit of mind than this sudden revulsion of ideas. His active brain needed no preparation to turn from subject to subject, but seemed to be always ready, at a

moment's notice, to take up a fresh line of thought with ardour. What it could not endure was to be left stranded with no theme on which to expatiate. In succeeding years, when it was often my daily enjoyment to listen to Lord Cromer's desultory conversation, as it leaped from subject to subject, I often thought of the alarming way in which "Bipontium" had pounced upon me at the dinner-table in the House of Commons.

Some years passed before I had the privilege of renewing my experience of that evening. It was not until after his retirement from Egypt in the autumn of 1907 that I saw him again, and not then for some months. He returned, it will be remembered, in broken health. He used to say that when King Edward VII. wrote out to Cairo, strongly pressing him to stay, he had replied, in the words of Herodotus, "I am too old, oh King, and too inactive; so bid thou one of the younger men here to do these things." He very soon, however, recovered elasticity of mind and body when the load of office was removed from his shoulders, and "inactive" was the last epithet which could ever be applied to Lord Cromer. He began to attend the House of Lords, but, like a wise man, he was in no hurry to speak there till he had grown accustomed to the tone of the place. His earliest utterance (I may note the date, February 6th, 1908) we listened to with equal respect and curiosity; this was a new element from which much enjoyment might be expected.

This maiden speech was not long, but it produced a very happy impression. The subject was the Anglo-Russian Convention, of which the orator cordially approved, and I recall that a certain sensation was caused by Lord Cromer's dwelling on the dangers of the Pan-Islamite intrigues in Egypt. This is the sort of thing that the House of Lords enjoys—a man of special knowledge speaking, almost confidentially, of matters within his

professional competency. During that year and the next Lord Cromer spoke with increasing frequency. There were great differences of opinion with regard to his efficiency in Parliament. I may acknowledge that I was not an unmeasured admirer of his oratory. When he rose from his seat on the Cross-bench, and advanced towards the table, with a fine gesture of his leonine head, sympathy was always mingled with respect. His independence and his honesty were patent, and his slight air of authority satisfactory. His public voice was not unpleasing, but when he was tired it became a little veiled, and he had the sad trick of dropping it at the end of his sentences. I confess that I sometimes found it difficult to follow what he was saying, and I do not think that he understood how to fill a large space with his voice. He spoke as a man accustomed to wind up the debates of a council sitting round a table, rather than as a senator addressing the benches of Parliament.

He was interested in the art of eloquence, and fond of criticising in private the methods of other speakers. He had a poor opinion of much studied oratory, and used to declare that no one had ever convinced him by merely felicitous diction. Perhaps he did not sufficiently realise that his own strength of purpose offered rather a granitic surface to persuasion. But no doubt he was right in saying that, coming as he did from the florid East, he found English eloquence more plain and businesslike than he left it. He used to declare that he never spoke impromptu if he could possibly help doing so, and he made great fun of the statesmen who say, "Little did I think when I came down to this House to-day that I should be called upon to speak," and then pour out by heart a Corinthian discourse. Lord Cromer always openly and frankly prepared his speeches, and I have seen him entranced in the process. As he always had a classical reference for everything he did, he was in the habit of mentioning that

Demosthenes also was unwilling to "put his faculty at the mercy of Fortune."

He became an habitual attendant at the House of Lords, and, while it was sitting, he usually appeared in the Library about an hour before the House met. He took a very lively interest in what was going on, examining new books, and making a thousand suggestions. If the Lords' Library contains to-day one of the most complete collections of Latin and Greek literature in the country, this is largely due to the zeal of Lord Cromer, who was always egging me on to the purchase of fresh rarities. He was indefatigable in kindness, sending me booksellers' catalogues in which curious texts were recorded, and scouring even Paris and Leipzig in our behalf. When I entered into this sport so heartily as to provide the Greek and Latin Fathers also for their Lordships, Lord Cromer became unsympathetic. He had no interest whatever in Origen or Tertullian, and I think it rather annoyed him to recall that several of these oracles of the early Church had written in Greek. Nothing in history or philosophy or poetry which the ancient world had handed down to us came amiss to Lord Cromer, but I think he considered it rather impertinent of the Fathers to have presumed to use the language of Attica. He had not an ecclesiastical mind.

Lord Cromer's familiar preoccupation with the classics was a point in his mental habits which deserves particular attention. I have always supposed that he inherited it from his mother, the Hon. Mrs. Baring, who was a Windham. She was a woman of learning; and she is said to have discomfited Sir William Harcourt at a dinner-table by quoting Lucan in direct disproof of a statement about the Druids which he had been rash enough to advance. She sang the odes of Anacreon to her son in his infancy, and we may conjecture that she sowed in his bosom the seeds of his love of antiquity. Lord Cromer made no pretension to be what

is called an "exact" scholar, but I think it is a mistake to say, as has been alleged, that he did not take up the study of Latin and Greek until middle life. It is true that he enjoyed no species of university training, but passed from Woolwich straight into the diplomatic service. In 1861, at the age of twenty, he was appointed A.D.C. to Sir Henry Storks in the Ionian Islands, and I believe that one of the first things he did was to look about for an instructor in ancient Greek. He found one in a certain Levantine in Corfu, whose name was Romano, and their studies opened with the odes of Anacreon. Whether this was a coincidence, or a compliment to Mrs. Baring, I do not know. This is a rather different account from what Lord Cromer gave in the preface to his *Paraphrases*, but I report it on his own later authority.

If his scholarship was not professorial, it was at least founded upon a genuine and enduring love of the ancient world. I suppose that for fifty years, after the episode in Corfu, however busy he was, however immersed in Imperial policy, he rarely spent a day without some communing with antiquity. He read Latin, and still more Greek, not in the spirit of a pedant or a pedagogue, but genuinely for pleasure and refreshment. He had no vanity about it, and if he had any doubt as to the meaning of a passage he would "consult the crib," as he used to say. We may conjecture further that he did not allow his curiosity to be balked by the barrier of a hopelessly obscure passage, but leaped over it, and went on. He always came back to Homer, whom he loved more than any other writer of the world, and particularly to the *Iliad*, which I think he knew nearly by heart. But he did not, as some pundits consider dignified and necessary, confine himself to the reading of the principal classics in order to preserve a pure taste. On the contrary, Lord Cromer, especially towards the close of his life, pushed up into all the byways of the Silver Age.

As he invariably talked about the books he happened to be reading, it was easy to trace his footsteps. Eight or nine years ago he had a sudden passion for Empedocles, whose fragments he had found collected and translated by Mr. Leonard, an American. Lord Cromer used to march into the Library, and greet me by calling out, "Do you know? Empedocles says" something or other, probably some parallelism with a modern phrase, the detection of which always particularly amused Lord Cromer.

In 1908 he took a fancy to Theognis, whose works I procured for him at the House of Lords, since he happened not to possess that writer at 36 Wimpole Street. He would settle himself in an armchair in the smoking-room, his eyes close to the book, and plunge into those dark waters of the gnomic elegist. He loved maxims and the expression of principles, and above all, as I have said, the discovery of identities of thought between the modern and the ancient world. He was delighted when he found in Theognis the proverb about having an ox on the tongue. I suppose this was quite well known to the learned, but the charm of the matter for Lord Cromer was that he was not deterred by any fear of academic criticism, and found out these things for himself. He read Theognis as other people read Rudyard Kipling, for stimulus and pleasure. He swept merely "scholarly" questions aside. He read his *Iliad* like a love-letter, but he was bored to death by discussions about the authorship of the Homeric epics.

In one matter, the serene good sense which was so prominently characteristic of Lord Cromer tinged his attitude towards the classics. He was not at all like Thomas Love Peacock, who entreated his friends to desist from mentioning anything that had happened in the world for the last 2,000 years. On the contrary, Lord Cromer was always bent on binding the old and the new together. It was very noticeable in his conversation that he was

fond of setting classic instances side by side with modern ones. If books dealt with this parallelism, they exercised a charm over Lord Cromer's imagination which may sometimes have led him a little astray about their positive value. I recall a moment when he was completely under the sway of M. Ferrero's *Greatness and Decline of Rome*, largely because of the pertinacity with which the Italian historian compares Roman institutions with modern social arrangements. It was interesting to the great retired proconsul to discover that Augustus "considered that in the majority of cases subject peoples had to be governed through their own national institutions." It is scarcely necessary to point out that these analogies form the basis of what is, perhaps, Lord Cromer's most important late essay, his *Ancient and Modern Imperialism.*

In a practical administration of India and Egypt, those oceans of unplumbed antiquity, the ordinary British official has neither time nor taste to do more than skim the surface of momentary experience. But Lord Cromer had always been acutely aware of the mystery of the East, and always looked back into the past with deep curiosity. Sometimes the modern life in Egypt, exciting as it was, almost seemed to him a phantasmagoria dancing across the real world of Rameses. This tendency of thought coloured one branch of his reading; he could not bear to miss a book which threw any light on the social and political manners of antiquity. Works like Fowler's *Social Life at Rome* or Marquardt's *Le Culte chez les Romains* thrilled him with excitement and animated his conversation for days. He wanted, above all things, to realise how the ancients lived and what feelings actuated their behaviour. On one occasion, in a fit of gaiety, I ventured to tell him that he reminded me of Mrs. Blimber (in *Dombey and Son*), who could have died contented had she visited Cicero in his retirement at beautiful Tusculum. "Well!" replied Lord

Cromer, laughing, "and a very delightful visit that would be."

In the admirable appreciation contributed to the *Times* by "C." (our other proconsular "C." !) it was remarked that the "quality of mental balance is visible in all that Lord Cromer wrote, whether in his official despatches, his published books, or his private correspondence." It was audible, too, in his delightful conversation, which was vivid, active, and yet never oppressive. He spoke with the firm accent of one accustomed to govern, but never dictatorially. His voice was a very agreeable one, supple and various in its tones, neither loud nor low. Although he had formed the life-long habit of expressing his opinions with directness, he never imposed them unfairly, or took advantage of his authority. On the contrary, there was something extremely winning in his eagerness to hear the reply of his interlocutor. "Well, there's a great deal in that," he would graciously and cordially say, and proceed to give the opposing statement what benefit he thought it deserved. He could be very trenchant, but I do not think that any one whom he had advanced to the privilege of his confidence can remember that he was so to a friend.

The attitude of Lord Cromer to life and letters—I speak, of course, only of what I saw in the years of his retirement from office—was not exactly representative of our own or even of the last century. He would have been at home in the fourth quarter of the eighteenth century, before the French Revolution. I judge him to have been born with an inflexible and commanding character, which in the person of many men exposed to such dangerous successes as he enjoyed might have degenerated into tyranny. On Lord Cromer, on the other hand, time produced a humanising and mellowing effect. It may very well prove that he has stamped his mark on the East of the twentieth century, as Turgot did his on the West of the nineteenth century;

but without straying into the perilous fields of prophecy, we are safe in recording the impression that Lord Cromer was not altogether a man of to-day; he looked forward and he looked backward. Probably the nearest counterpart to his manner of mind and conversation may be found in the circle of whom we read in the *Diary* of Fanny Burney. We can conceive Lord Cromer leaning against the Committee Box in earnest conversation with Mr. Windham and Mr. Burke at Warren Hastings' trial. We can restore the half-disdainful gesture with which he would drop an epigram (" from the Greek ") into the Bath Easton Vase. His politeness and precision, his classical quotations, his humour, his predilections in literature and art, were those of the inner circle of Whigs nearly a century and a half ago, and I imagine that their talk was very much like his.

He was fond of repeating Bagehot's description of the Whigs, and it seems to me to apply so exactly to himself that I will quote part of it :—

" Perhaps as long as there has been a political history in this country there have been certain men of a cool, moderate, resolute firmness, not gifted with high imagination, little prone to enthusiastic sentiment, heedless of large theories and speculations, careless of dreamy scepticism, with a clear view of the next step, and a wise intention to take it; a strong conviction that the elements of knowledge are true, and a steady belief that the present would, can, and should be quietly improved."

In a full analysis of Lord Cromer's character, I think that every clause of this description might be expanded with illustrations. In the intellectual domain, Bagehot's words, " little prone to enthusiastic sentiment," seem made to fit Lord Cromer's detachment from all the tendencies of romanticism. His literary tastes were highly

developed and eagerly indulged, but they were all in their essence pre-Revolutionary. Those who are familiar with a book once famous, the *Diary of a Lover of Literature* of Thomas Green, written down to the very end of the eighteenth century, have in their hands a volume in which the very accents of Lord Cromer may seem to be heard. Isaac d'Israeli said that Green had humbled all modern authors in the dust; Lord Cromer had a short way with many of the writers most fashionable at this moment. When he was most occupied with the resuscitations of ancient manners, of which I have already spoken, I found to my surprise that he had never read *Marius the Epicurean.* I recommended it to him, and with his usual instant response to suggestion, he got it at once and began reading it. But I could not persuade him to share my enthusiasm, and, what was not like him, he did not read *Marius* to the end. The richness and complication of Pater's style annoyed him. He liked prose to be clear and stately; he liked it, in English, to be Addisonian. Even Gibbon—though he read *The Decline and Fall* over again, very carefully, so late as 1913—was not entirely to his taste. He enjoyed the limpidity and the irony, but the sustained roll of Gibbon's antitheses vexed him a little. He liked prose to be quite simple.

In many ways, Lord Cromer, during those long and desultory conversations about literature which will be so perennial a delight to look back upon, betrayed his constitutional detestation of the Romantic attitude. He believed himself to be perfectly catholic in his tastes, and resented the charge of prejudice. But he was, in fact, irritated by the excesses and obscurities of much that is fashionable to-day in the world of letters, and he refused his tribute of incense to several popular idols. He thought that, during the course of the nineteenth century, German influences had seriously perturbed the balance of taste in

Europe. I do not know that Lord Cromer had pursued these impressions very far, or that he had formed any conscious theory with regard to them. But he was very "eighteenth century" in his suspicion of enthusiasm, and I always found him amusingly impervious to ideas of a visionary or mystical order. It was impossible that so intelligent and omnivorous a reader as he should not be drawn to the pathetic figure of Pascal, but he was puzzled by him. He described him as "manifestly a man full of contrasts, difficult to understand, and as many-sided as Odysseus." On another occasion, losing patience with Pascal, he called him "a half-lunatic man of genius." Fénélon annoyed him still more; the spiritual experiences of the Archbishop of Cambrai he found "almost incomprehensible." His surprising, but after all perfectly consistent, comment on both Fénélon and Pascal was, "How much more easy Buffon is to understand!"

He recommended all young men who intend to take a part in politics carefully to study pre-Revolutionary history, and one of his objections to the romantic literature of Rousseau downwards was that it did not help such study. It was too individualistic in its direction. It tended, moreover, Lord Cromer thought, to disturb the balance of judgment, that "level-headedness" which he valued so highly, and had exercised with such magnificent authority. He disliked the idea that genius involved a lack of sanity, or, in other words, of self-command. He regretted that Dryden had given general currency to this idea by his famous lines in *Absalom and Achitophel*:—

> "Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
> And thin partitions do their bounds divide;"

but Lord Cromer was himself, perhaps, too ready to account by insanity for every odd or confused expression in literature. He had nothing to say about Mazzini, whom he swept aside

impatiently, except that he "was a semi-lunatic," and I have heard him declare of Chatterton and Verlaine—a strange couple—that they were a pair of madmen. He objected violently to Baudelaire, but I think he knew very little about that poet's works.

If I mention these things, it is because they seem to be necessary to give human character to any sketch of the mind of Lord Cromer. He himself hated mere eulogy, which he said had ruined most of the biographies of the world. The official lives of Disraeli and Gladstone did not escape a measure of his blame in this respect, and it will be recalled that resentment against what he thought a shadowless portrait led to his own very vivacious paper on Disraeli, which he afterwards issued as a pamphlet. He was an avid reader of memoirs, and of political memoirs in particular, but he almost always passed upon them the same criticism—that they were too *public*. "I don't want Mr. ——," he would say, "to tell me what I can learn for myself by turning up the file of the *Morning Post*. I want him to tell me what I can't find out elsewhere. And he need not be so very much afraid of hinting that his hero had faults, for if he had not had defects we should never have heard of his qualities. We are none of us perfect, and we don't want a priggish biographer to pretend that we are." He was speaking here mainly of political matters; but Lord Cromer's training and experience had a strong bearing on his literary tastes. With him politics reacted on literature, although he liked to fancy that he kept them wholly apart.

No doubt a selection from his correspondence will one day be given to the world, for he was a vivid, copious, and daring letter-writer. I suppose that he wrote to each of his friends mainly on the subject which absorbed that friend most, and as his own range of sympathies and interests was very wide, it is probable that his letters will prove excellent general reading. As in so many other of

the departments of life, Lord Cromer did not think letter-writing a matter to be lightly regarded or approached without responsibility. He said :—

"There are two habits which I have contracted, and which I have endeavoured to pass on to my children, as I have found them useful. One is to shut the door after me when I leave the room, and the other is always to affix the day of the month and the year to every document, however unimportant, that I sign. I have received numbers of letters, not only from women, one of whose numerous privileges it is to be vague, but also from men in high official positions, dated with the day of the week only. When the document is important, such a proceeding is a fraud on posterity."

He often, both in conversation and in letters, took up one of his favourite classic tags, and wove a shrewd modern reflection round it. For instance, a couple of years before the war, a phrase of Aristotle recommending a ruthless egotism in the conduct of war, led him to say :—

"I think that at times almost every modern nation has acted on this principle, though they gloss it over with fine words. Its principal exponents of late have unquestionably been the Hohenzollerns."

And, in connection with the axiom of Thucydides that war educates through violence, he wrote, about the same time :—

"The Germans, who, in spite of their culture, preserve a strain of barbarism in their characters, are the modern representatives of this view. There is just this amount of truth in it — that at the cost of undue and appalling

sacrifices, war brings out certain fine qualities in individuals, and sometimes in nations."

This may, surely, be taken as a direct prophecy of the magnificent effort of France. Lord Cromer's reflections, thrown off in the warmth of personal contact, often had a pregnant directness. For instance, how good this is:—

"The prejudice against the Bœotians was probably in a large measure due to the fact that, as the late Lord Salisbury might have said, they 'put their money on the wrong horse' during the Persian war. So also, it may be observed, did the oracle at Delphi."

Lord Cromer's public speeches and published writings scarcely give a hint of his humour, which was lambent and sometimes almost boyish. He loved to be amused, and he repaid his entertainer by being amusing. I suppose that after his return from Cairo he allowed this feature of his character a much freer run. The legend used to be that he was looked upon in Egypt as rather grim, and by no means to be trifled with. He was not the man, we may be sure, to be funny with a Young Turk, or to crack needless jokes with a recalcitrant Khedive. But retirement softened him, and the real nature of Lord Cromer, with its elements of geniality and sportiveness, came into full play.

Eight years ago, I regret to admit, Mr. Lloyd George was not the universal favourite in the House of Lords that he has since become. Lord Cromer was one of those who were not entirely reconciled to the financial projects of the new Chancellor of the Exchequer. He compared the Chancellor with Pescennius Niger,

"who aspired to be Emperor after the death of Pertinax, and was already Governor of Syria. On being asked by the inhabitants of that province to diminish the land tax,

he replied that, so far as he was concerned, not only would he effect no diminution, but he regretted that he could not tax the air which they breathed."

The strained relations between Mr. Lloyd George and the House of Lords inspired Lord Cromer with a really delightful parallel from Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* (which, by the way, was one of his favourite poems):—

> "Thus, worn or weakened, well or ill content,
> Submit they must to DAVID'S government;
> Impoverished and deprived of all command,
> Their taxes doubled as they lost their land;
> And—what was harder yet to flesh and blood,
> Their gods disgraced, and burnt like common wood."

When he pointed this out to me, I entreated him to introduce it into a speech on the Budget. But he said that he was not sure of his audience, and then it was most painful to an orator to make a literary reference which was not taken up. Once at Sheffield, when he was urging the necessity of a strong Navy upon a large public meeting, he quoted Swinburne's splendid lines:—

> "All our past comes wailing in the wind,
> And all our future thunders on the sea,"

without producing any effect at all. But the House of Lords is not an illiterate audience, and I recollect that on one occasion, when Lord Cromer himself was speaking on preferential treatment for the Colonies, and quoted Prior:—

> "Euphemia (that is Preference) serves to grace my measure,
> But Chloe (that is Protection) is my real flame,"

the Peers received the couplet with hilarious appreciation.

He was very entertaining about the oddities of his life in the East, and his stories were numberless. One was of a petition which he once received from a young Egyptian with a grievance, which opened with these words:—

"O Hell! Lordship's face grow red when he hear quite beastly behaviour of Public Works Department towards his humble servant."

He used to repeat these things with an inimitable chuckle of enjoyment.

We have been told that he who blows through bronze may breathe through silver. The severe preoccupations of Lord Cromer's public life did not prevent him from sedulously cultivating the art of verse. In 1903, before his retirement from Egypt, he published a volume of *Paraphrases and Translations from the Greek*, in the preparation or selection of which I believe that he enjoyed the advice of Mr. Mackail. It was rather unlucky that, with a view to propitiate the angry critics, Lord Cromer prefixed to this little book a preface needlessly modest. He had no cause to apologise so deeply for exercises which were both elegant and learned. It is a curious fact that, in this collection of paraphrases, the translator did not touch the Attic authors whom he knew so well—he used to copy out pages of Æschylus and Sophocles in his loose Greek script, with notes of his own—but dealt entirely with lyric and epigrammatic poets of the Alexandrian age. Perhaps it seemed to him less daring to touch them than to affront Æschylus. He was not quite sure about these verses of his; he liked them, and then he was afraid that they were unworthy of the original. Out in Cairo it was so difficult, he said, to get a critical opinion.

Among his unpublished translations there is one, from a fragment of Euripides, which should not be lost, if only because Lord Cromer himself liked it better than any other of his versions. It runs:—

"I learn what may be taught;
I seek what may be sought;
My other wants I dare
To ask from Heaven in prayer."

Of his satirical *vers-de-société*, which it amused him to distribute in private, he never, I believe, gave any to the world, but they deserve preservation. Some serious reflections on the advantages of the British occupation of Egypt close with the quotation :—

> " Let them suffice for Britain's need—
> No nobler prize was ever won—
> The blessings of a people freed,
> The consciousness of duty done."

These were, in a high degree, the rewards of Lord Cromer himself.

After his settlement in London, Mr. T. E. Page sent him a book, called *Between Whiles*, of English verse translated into Latin and Greek. Lord Cromer was delighted with this, and the desire to write in metre returned to him. He used to send his friends, in letters, little triolets and epigrams, generally in English, but sometimes in Greek. But he was more ambitious than this. So lately as February 1911, during the course of one of our long conversations upon literature, he asked me to suggest a task of translation on which he could engage. It was just the moment when he was particularly busy with Constitutional Free Trade and Woman Suffrage and other public topics, but that made no difference. It had always seemed to me that he had been most happy in his versions of the Bucolic poets, and so I urged him to continue his translations by attempting the *Europa* of Moschus. He looked at it, and pronounced it unattractive. I was therefore not a little surprised to receive a letter, on March 25th, in which he said :—

" Not sleeping very well last night, I composed in my head these few lines merely as a specimen to begin *Europa* :—

> " When dawn is nigh, at the third watch of night,
> What time, more sweet than honey of the bee,

Sleep courses through the brain some vision bright,
  To lift the veil which hides futurity,
Fair Cypris sent a fearful dream to mar
  The slumbers of a maid whose frightened eyes
Pictured the direful clash of horrid war,
  And she, Europa, was the victor's prize."

"They are, of course, only a first attempt, and I do not think much of them myself. But do you think the sort of style and metre suitable?"

He went steadily on till he completed the poem, and on April 27th I received a packet endorsed "Patched-up Moschus returned herewith." So far as I know, this version of the *Europa*, conducted with great spirit in his seventieth year, has never been published. It is the longest and most ambitious of all his poetical experiments.

Lord Cromer was fond of saying that he considered the main beauty of Greek poetry to reside in its simplicity. In all his verses he aimed at limpidity and ease. He praised the Greek poets for not rhapsodising about the beauties of nature, and this was very characteristic of his own eighteenth-century habit of mind. His general attitude to poetry, which he read incessantly and in four languages, was a little difficult to define. He was ready to give lists of his life-long prime favourites, and, as was very natural, these differed from time to time. But one list of the books he had "read more frequently than any other" consisted of the *Iliad*, the Book of Job, *Tristram Shandy*, and *Pickwick*, to which he added *Lycidas* and the Tenth Satire of Juvenal. It would require a good deal of ingenuity to bring these six masterpieces into line. He was consistent in declaring that the 28th chapter of Job was "the finest bit of poetry ever written."

He was violently carried away in 1912 by reading Mr. Livingstone's book on *The Greek Genius*. It made him a little regret the pains he had expended on the Hymns of

Callimachus and the Bucolics of Theocritus, and he thought that perhaps he ought to have confined himself to the severer and earlier classics. But surely he had followed his instinct, and it would have been a pity if he had narrowed his range. It was the modernness of the Alexandrian authors, and perhaps their Egyptian flavour, which had justly attracted him. He did not care very much for an antiquity which he could not revivify for his own vision. I urged him to read a book which had fascinated me, *The Religion of Numa*, by a learned American, the late Mr. Jesse Carter. Lord Cromer read it with respect, but he admitted that those earliest Roman ages were too remote and cold for him.

Lord Cromer was very much annoyed with Napoleon for having laid it down that *après soixante ans, un homme ne vaut rien*. The rash dictum had certainly no application to himself. It is true that, under the strain of the long tropical years, his bodily health declined as he approached the age of sixty. But his mental activity, his marvellous receptivity, were not merely maintained, but seemed steadily to advance. He continued to be consumed by that lust for knowledge, *libido sciendi*, which he admired in the ancient Greeks. When the physicians forbade him, four years ago, to expend his failing strength any longer on political and social propaganda, instead of retiring, as most men of his age would have done, to dream in the recesses of his library, he plunged with renewed ardour into the one occupation still permitted to him: literature. The accident of his publishing a criticism which excited wide popular attention led to his becoming, when past his seventieth birthday, a "regular reviewer" for the *Spectator*, where the very frequent papers signed "C." became a prominent feature. Those articles were, perhaps most remarkable for the light they threw on the writer's own temperament, on his insatiable desire for knowledge.

Lord Cromer's curiosity in all intellectual directions was, to the last, like that of a young man beginning his mental career; and when he adopted the position, so uncommon in a man of his experience and authority, of a reviewer of current books, it was because he wished to share with others the excitement he himself enjoyed in the tapping of fresh sources of information.

III

THE LAST DAYS OF LORD REDESDALE

The publication of Lord Redesdale's *Memories*—which was one of the most successful autobiographies of recent times—familiarised thousands of readers with the principal adventures of a very remarkable man, but, when all was said and done, left an incomplete impression of his taste and occupations on the minds of those who were not familiar with his earlier writings. His literary career had been a very irregular one. He took up literature rather late, and produced a book that has become a classic—*Tales of Old Japan*. He did not immediately pursue this success, but became involved in public activities of many kinds, which distracted his attention. In his sixtieth year he brought out *The Bamboo Garden*, and from that time—until, in his eightieth year, he died in full intellectual energy—he constantly devoted himself to the art of writing. His zeal, his ambition, were wonderful; but it was impossible to overlook the disadvantage from which that ambition and that zeal suffered in the fact that for the first sixty years of his life the writer had cultivated the art but casually and sporadically. He retained, in spite of all the labour which he expended, a certain stiffness, an air of the amateur, of which he himself was always acutely conscious.

This did not interfere with the direct and sincere appeal made to general attention by the 1915 *Memories*, a book so full of geniality and variety, so independent in its judgments and so winning in its ingenuousness, that its wider popularity could be the object of no surprise. But, to those who knew Lord Redesdale intimately, it must always appear that his autobiography fails to explain him from what we may call the subjective point of view. It tells us of his adventures and his friendships, of the strange lands he visited and of the unexpected confidences he received, but it does not reveal very distinctly the character of the writer. There is far more of his intellectual constitution, of his personal tastes and mental habits, in the volume of essays of 1912, called *A Tragedy in Stone*, but even here much is left unsaid and even unsuggested.

Perhaps the most remarkable fact about Lord Redesdale was the redundant vitality of his character. His nature swarmed with life, like a drop of pond-water under a microscope. There cannot be found room in any one nature for all the qualities, and what he lacked in some degree was concentration. But very few men who have lived in our complicated age have done well in so many directions as he, or, aiming widely, have failed in so few. He shrank from no labour and hesitated before no difficulty, but pushed on with an extraordinary energy along many various lines of activity. But the two lines in which he most desired and most determined to excel, gardening and authorship, are scarcely to be discerned, except below the surface, in his *Memories*. Next to his books, what he regarded with most satisfaction was his wonderful garden at Batsford, and of this there is scarcely a word of record in the autobiography. He had always intended to celebrate this garden, and when he was preparing to return to Batsford in 1915 he wrote to me that he was going to write an *Apologia pro Horto meo*, as

long before he had composed one *pro Bambusis meis.* A book which should combine with the freest fancies of his intellect a picture of the exotic groves of Batsford was what was required to round off Lord Redesdale's literary adventures. It will be seen that he very nearly succeeded in thus setting the top-stone on his literary edifice.

One reason, perhaps, why Batsford, which was ever present to his thoughts, is so very slightly and vaguely mentioned in Lord Redesdale's *Memories*, may be the fact that from 1910 onwards he was not living in it himself, and that it was irksome to him to magnify in print horticultural beauties which were for the time being in the possession of others. The outbreak of the war, in which all his five sons were instantly engaged, was the earliest of a series of changes which completely altered the surface of Lord Redesdale's life. Batsford came once more into his personal occupation, and at the same time it became convenient to give up his London house in Kensington Court. Many things combined to transform his life in the early summer of 1915. His eldest son, Major the Hon. Clement Mitford, after brilliantly distinguishing himself in battle, was received by the King and decorated, to the rapturous exultation of his father. Major Mitford returned to the French front, only to fall on May 13th, 1915.

At this time I was seeing Lord Redesdale very frequently, and I could not but be struck by the effect of this blow upon his temperament. After the first shock of sorrow, I observed in him the determination not to allow himself to be crushed. His dominant vitality asserted itself almost with violence, and he seemed to clench his teeth in defiance of the assault on his individuality. It required on the part of so old a man no little fortitude, for it is easier to bear a great and heroic bereavement than to resist the wearing vexation of seeing one's system of daily occupation crumbling away. Lord Redesdale was pleased to be going again to Batsford,

which had supplied him in years past with so much sumptuous and varied entertainment, but it was a matter of alarm with him to give up all, or almost all, the various ties with London which had meant so much to his vividly social nature.

Meanwhile, during the early months of 1915 in London, he had plenty of employment in finishing and revising his *Memories*, which it had taken him two years to write. This was an occupation which bridged over the horrid chasm between his old active life in London, with its thousand interests, and the uncertain and partly dreaded prospect of exile in the bamboo-gardens of a remote corner of Gloucestershire, where he foresaw that deafness must needs exclude him from the old activities of local life.

He finished revising the manuscript of his *Memories* in July, and then went down, while the actual transference of his home was taking place, to the Royal Yacht Squadron Castle, Cowes, where he had been accustomed to spend some of the most enjoyable hours of his life. But this scene, habitually thronged with people, and palpitating with gaiety, in the midst of which Lord Redesdale found himself so singularly at home, was now, more than perhaps any other haunt of the English sportsman, in complete eclipse. The weather was lovely, but there were no yachts, no old chums, no charming ladies. "It is very dull," he wrote; "the sole inhabitant of the Club besides myself was Lord Falkland, and now he is gone." In these conditions Lord Redesdale became suddenly conscious that the activity of the last two or three years was over, that the aspect of his world had changed, and that he was in danger of losing that hold upon life to which he so resolutely clung. In conditions of this kind he always turned to seek for something mentally "craggy," as Byron said, and at Cowes he wonderfully found the writings of Nietzsche. The result is described in a remarkable letter to myself (July 28th, 1915), which

I quote because it marks the earliest stage in the composition of his last unfinished book :—

" I have been trying to occupy myself with Nietzsche, on the theory that there must be something great about a man who exercised the immense influence that he did. But I confess I am no convert to any of his various moods. Here and there I find gems of thought, but one has to wade through a morass of blue mud to get at them. Here is a capital saying of his which may be new to you—in a letter to his friend Rohde he writes : ' Eternally we need midwives in order to be delivered of our thoughts.' We cannot work in solitude. ' Woe to us who lack the sunlight of a friend's presence.'

" How true that is ! When I come down here, I think that with so much time on my hands I shall be able to get through a pile of work. Not a bit of it ! I find it difficult even to write a note. To me it is an imperative necessity to have the sympathetic counsel of a friend."

The letter continued with an impassioned appeal to his correspondent to find some definite intellectual work for him to undertake. " You make me dare, and that is much towards winning a game. You must sharpen my wits, which are blunt enough just now." In short, it was a cry from the island of boredom to come over the water and administer first-aid.

Accordingly, I started for Cowes, and was welcomed at the pier with all my host's habitual and vivacious hospitality. Scarcely were we seated in our wicker-chairs in face of the Solent, not twinkling as usual with pleasure-sails, but sinister with strange instruments of warfare, than he began the attack. " What am I to do with myself ? " was the instant question ; " what means can I find of occupying this dreadful void of leisure ? " To which the obvious

reply was: "First of all, you must exhibit to me the famous attractions of Cowes!" "There are none," he replied in comic despair, but we presently invented some, and my visit, which extended over several radiant days of a perfect August, was diversified with walks and excursions by land and water, in which my companion was as active and as ardent as though he had been nineteen instead of seventy-nine. In a suit picturesquely marine, with his beautiful silver hair escaping from a jaunty yachting cap, he was the last expression of vivacity and gaiety.

The question of his intellectual occupation in the future came, however, incessantly to the front; and our long talks in the strange and uncanny solitude of the Royal Yacht Squadron Castle always came to this: What task was he to take up next? His large autobiography was now coming back to him from the printers in packets of proof, with which he was closeted night and morning; and I suggested that while this was going on there was no need for him to think about future enterprises. To tell the truth, I had regarded the *Memories* as likely to be the final labour of Lord Redesdale's busy life. It seemed to me that at his advanced age he might now well withdraw into dignified repose. I even hinted so much in terms as delicate as I could make them, but the suggestion was not well received. I became conscious that there was nothing he was so little prepared to welcome as "repose"; that, in fact, the terror which possessed him was precisely the dread of having to withdraw from the stage of life. His deafness, which now began to be excessive, closed to his eager spirit so many of the avenues of experience, that he was more than ever anxious to keep clear those that remained to him, and of these, literary expression came to be almost the only one left. In the absence of a definite task his path in this direction led through darkness.

But it was not until after several suggestions and many

conversations that light was found. The friend so pressingly appealed to returned to London, where he was stern in rejecting several projects, hotly flung at his head and then coldly abandoned. A study of the Empress Maria Theresa, suggested by a feverish perusal of Pechler, was the latest and least attractive of these. Lord Redesdale then frankly demanded that a subject should be found for him. "You have brought this upon yourself," he said, "by encouraging me to write." What might prove the scheme of a very pleasant book then occurred to me, and I suggested to the fiery and impatient author, who had by this time retired for good to Batsford, that he should compose a volume of essays dealing with things in general, but bound together by a constantly repeated reference to his wild garden of bamboos and the Buddha in his secret grove. The author was to suppose himself seated with a friend on the terrace at the top of the garden, and to let the idea of the bamboo run through the whole tissue of reflections and reminiscences like an emerald thread. Lord Redesdale was enchanted, and the idea took fire at once. He replied :—

"You are Orpheus, with his lute moving the rocks and stones! I shall work all my conceits into your plan, and am now proceeding to my garden shrine to meditate on it. I will try to make a picture of the VELUVANA, the bamboo-garden which was the first Vikara or monastery of Buddha and his disciples. There I will sit, and, looking on the great statue of Buddha in meditation, I shall begin to arrange all sorts of wild imaginings which may come into my crazy brain."

In this way was started the book, of which, alas! only such fragments were composed as form the earlier part of the volume published after his death. It is, however, right to point out that for the too-brief remainder of his life

Lord Redesdale was eagerly set on the scheme of which a hint has just been given. The *Veluvana* was to be the crowning production of his literary life, and it was to sum up the wisdom of the East and the gaiety of the West. He spoke of it incessantly, in letters and conversation. "That will do to go into *Veluvana*," was his cry when he met with anything rare or strange. For instance, on September 15th, 1915, he wrote to me:—

"To-day, all of a sudden I was struck by the idea that plants, having many human qualities, may also in some degree have human motives—that they are not altogether mere automata—and as I thought, I began to imagine that I could detect something resembling purpose in the movements of certain plants. I have jotted down a few notes, and you will see when I expand them that at any rate the idea calls attention to the movements themselves, some of which seem never to have been noticed at all, or certainly at best very inadequately. You will see that this brings in the bamboo-garden and Buddha, and so keeps to the scheme of *Veluvana*."

The monasteries of twelfth-century Japanese Buddhism, which he had visited long before in the neighbourhood of Kiōto, now recurred to his memory, and he proposed to describe in what a monk of Hiyeisan differed from an Indian Buddhist monk. This was a theme of extraordinary interest, and wholly germane to his purpose. It drove him back to his Japanese books, and to his friend Sir Ernest Satow's famous dictionary. He wrote to me:—

"No praise can be too high for the work which Satow did in the early days of our intercourse with Japan. He was a valuable asset to England, and to Sir Harry Parkes, who, with all his energy and force of character, would never have

succeeded as he did without Satow. Aston was another very strong man."

These reveries were strictly in accordance with the spirit of *Veluvana*, but unfortunately what Lord Redesdale wrote in this direction proved to be too slight for publication. He met with some expressions of extremely modern Japanese opinion which annoyed him, and to which he was tempted to give more attention than they deserve. It began to be obvious that the enterprise was one for which great concentration of effort, and a certain serenity of purpose which was not to be secured at will, were imperatively needed. In leaving London, he was not content, and no one could have wished him to be willing, to break abruptly all the cords of his past life. He was still a Trustee of the National Gallery, still chairman of the Marlborough Club, still occupied with the administration of the Wallace Collection, and he did not abate his interest in these directions. They made it necessary that he should come up to town every other week. This made up in some measure for the inevitable disappointment of finding that in Gloucestershire his deafness now completely cut him off from all the neighbourly duties which had in earlier years diversified and entertained his country life. He had been a great figure among the squires and farmers of the Cotswolds, but all this was now at an end, paralysed by the hopeless decay of his hearing. It grieved him, too, that he was unable to do any useful war-work in the county, and he was forced to depend upon his pen and his flying visits to London for refreshment. He was a remarkably good letter-writer, and he now demanded almost pathetically to be fed with the apples of correspondence. He wrote (November 26th, 1915):—

"Your letters are a consolation for being deprived of taking a part any longer in the doings of the great world.

The Country Mouse—even if the creature were able to scuttle back into the cellars of the great—would still be out of all communion with the mighty, owing to physical infirmity. And now comes the kind Town Mouse and tells him all that he most cares to know."

He had books and his garden to enjoy, and he made the most of both. "I hate the autumn," he said, "for it means the death of the year, but I try to make the death of the garden as beautiful as possible." Among his plants, and up and down the high places of his bamboo-feathered rockeries, where little cascades fell with a music which he could no longer hear into small dark pools full of many-coloured water-lilies, his activity was like that of a boy. He had the appearance, the tastes, the instincts of vigorous manhood prolonged far beyond the usual limit of such gifts, and yet all were marred and rendered bankrupt for him by the one intolerable defect, the deafness which had by this time become almost impenetrable to sound.

Yet it seemed as though this disability actually quickened his mental force. With the arrival of his eightieth year, his activity and curiosity of intellect were certainly rather increased than abated. He wrote to me from Batsford (December 28th, 1915):—

"I have been busy for the last two months making a close study of Dante. I have read all the *Inferno* and half of the *Purgatorio*. It is hard work, but the 'readings' of my old schoolfellow, W. W. Vernon, are an incalculable help, and now within the last week or two has appeared Hoare's Italian Dictionary, published by the Cambridge University Press. A much-needed book, for the previous dictionaries were practically useless except for courier's work. How splendid Dante is! But how sickening are the Commentators, Benvenuto da Imola, Schartazzini and the rest of

them! They won't let the poet say that the sun shone or the night was dark without seeing some hidden and mystic meaning in it. They always seem to *chercher midi à quatorze heures*, and irritate me beyond measure. There is invention enough in Dante without all their embroidery. But this grubbing and grouting seems to be infectious among Dante scholars—they all catch the disease."

He flung himself into these Italian studies with all his accustomed ardour. He corresponded with the eminent veteran of Dante scholarship, the Honourable W. W. Vernon, whom he mentions in the passage just quoted, and Mr. Vernon's letters gave him great delight. He wrote to me again:—

"This new object in life gives me huge pleasure. Of course, I knew the catch quotations in Dante, but I never before attempted to read him. The difficulty scared me."

Now, on the contrary, the difficulty was an attraction. He worked away for hours at a time, braving the monotonies of the *Purgatorio* without flagging, but he broke down early in the *Paradiso*. He had no sympathy whatever with what is mystic and spiritual, and he was extremely bored by the Beatific Vision and the Rose of the Empyrean. I confess I took advantage of this to recall his attention to *Veluvana*, for which it was no longer possible to hope that the author would collect any material out of Dante.

An invitation from Cambridge to lecture there on Russian history during the Long Vacation of 1916 was a compliment to the value of the Russian chapters of his *Memories*, but it was another distraction. It took his thoughts away from *Veluvana*, although he protested to me that he could

prepare his Cambridge address, and yet continue to marshal his fancies for the book. Perhaps I doubted it, and dared to disapprove, for he wrote (March 17th, 1916) :—

" You scold me for writing too much. That is the least of my troubles! You must remember that debarred as I am from taking part in society, the Three R's alone remain to me, and, indeed, of those only two—for owing to my having enjoyed an Eton education in days when arithmetic was deemed to be no part of the intellectual panoply of a gentleman, I can neither add, subtract, nor divide! I am a gluttonous reader, and only write from time to time."

He was really composing more actively than he himself realised. About this time he wrote :—

" Just now I am busy trying to whitewash Lord Hertford —not the Marquess of Steyne, that would be impossible— but the unhappy hypochondriac recluse of the Rue Lafitte, who I believe has been most malignantly traduced by the third-rate English Colony in Paris—all his faults exaggerated, none of his good qualities even hinted at. The good British public has so long been used to look upon him as a minotaur that it will perhaps startle and amuse it to be told that he had many admirable points."

At the beginning of last year the aspect of Lord Redesdale was very remarkable. He had settled down into his life at Batsford, diversified by the frequent dashes to London. His years seemed to sit upon him more lightly than ever. His azure eyes, his curled white head thrown back, the almost jaunty carriage of his well-kept figure, were the external symbols of an inner man perpetually fresh, ready for adventure and delighted with the pageant of existence. He found no fault at all with life, save that it must leave

him, and he had squared his shoulders not to give way to weakness. Perhaps the only sign of weakness was just that visible determination to be strong. But the features of his character had none of those mental wrinkles, those "rides de l'esprit," which Montaigne describes as proper to old age. Lord Redesdale was guiltless of the old man's self-absorption or exclusive interest in the past. His curiosity and sympathy were vividly exhibited to his friends, and so, in spite of his amusing violence in denouncing his own forgetfulness, was his memory of passing events. In the petulance of his optimism he was like a lad.

There was no change in the early part of last year, although it was manifest that the incessant journeying between Batsford and London exhausted him. The garden occupied him more and more, and he was distracted by the great storm of the end of March, which blew down and destroyed at the head of the bridge the wonderful group of cypresses, which he called "the pride of my old age." But, after a gesture of despair, he set himself energetically to repair the damage. He was in his usual buoyant health when the very hot spell in May tempted him out on May 18th, with his agent, Mr. Kennedy, to fish at Swinbrook, a beautiful village on his Oxfordshire property, of which he was particularly fond. He was not successful, and in a splenetic mood he flung himself at full length upon a bank of wet grass. He was not allowed to remain there long, but the mischief was done, and in a few hours he was suffering from a bad cold. Even now, the result might not have been serious had it not been that in a few days' time he was due to fulfil certain engagements in town. Nothing vexed Lord Redesdale more than not to keep a pledge. In all such matters he prided himself on being punctual and trustworthy, and he refused to change his plans by staying at home.

Accordingly, on May 23rd he came to London to

transact some business, and to take the chair next day at a meeting of the Royal Society of Literature, of which he was a vice-president. This meeting took place in the afternoon, and he addressed a crowded assembly, which greeted him with great warmth. Those who were present, and saw his bright eyes and heard his ringing voice, could have no suspicion that they would see him again no more. His intimate friends alone perceived that he was making a superlative effort. There followed a very bad night, and he went down to Batsford next day, going straight to his bed, from which he never rose again. His condition, at first, gave rise to little alarm. The disease, which proved to be catarrhal jaundice, took its course; but for a long time his spirit and his unconsciousness of danger sustained him and filled those around him with hope. There was no disturbance of mind to the very last. In a shaky hand, with his stylograph, he continued to correspond with certain friends, about politics, and books, and even about *Veluvana*. In the beginning of August there seemed to be symptoms of improvement, but these were soon followed by a sudden and final relapse. Even after this, Lord Redesdale's interest and curiosity were sustained. In his very last letter to myself, painfully scrawled only one week before his death, he wrote:—

"Have you seen Ernest Daudet's book just published, *Les auteurs de la guerre de* 1914? Bismarck is the subject of the first volume; the second will deal with the Kaiser and the Emperor Joseph; and the third with *leurs complices*. I know E. D.; he is a brother of Alphonse, and is a competent historian. His book is most illuminating. Of course there are exaggerations, but he is always well *documenté*, and there is much in his work that is new. I don't admire his style. The abuse of the historic present is bad enough, but what can be said in favour of the historic future with

which we meet at every step? It sets my teeth on edge."

But he grew physically weaker, and seven days later he passed into an unconscious state, dying peacefully at noon on August 17th, 1916. He was saved, as he had wished to be, from all consciousness of decrepitude.

THOMAS HARDY'S LYRICAL POETRY

V. Sitaraman

THE LYRICAL POETRY OF THOMAS HARDY

When, about Christmas time in 1898, Mr. Hardy's admirers, who were expecting from him a new novel, received instead a thick volume of verse, there was mingled with their sympathy and respect a little disappointment and a great failure in apprehension. Those who were not rude enough to suggest that a cobbler should stick to his last, reminded one another that many novelists had sought relaxation by trifling with the Muses. Thackeray had published *Ballads*, and George Eliot had expatiated in a *Legend of Jubal*. No one thought the worse of *Coningsby* because its author had produced a *Revolutionary Epic*. It took some time for even intelligent criticism to see that the new *Wessex Poems* did not fall into this accidental category, and still, after twenty years, there survives a tendency to take the verse of Mr. Hardy, abundant and solid as it has become, as a mere subsidiary and ornamental appendage to his novels. It is still necessary to insist on the complete independence of his career as a poet, and to point out that if he had never published a page of prose he would deserve to rank high among the writers of his country on the score of the eight volumes of his verse. It is as a lyrical poet, and solely as a lyrical poet, that I propose to speak of him to-day.

It has been thought extraordinary that Cowper was over fifty when he published his first secular verses, but

Mr. Hardy was approaching his sixtieth year when he sent *Wessex Poems* to the press. Such self-restraint—" none hath by more studious ways endeavoured, and with more unwearied spirit none shall"—has always fascinated the genuine artist, but few have practised it with so much tenacity. When the work of Mr. Hardy is completed, nothing, it is probable, will more strike posterity than its unity, its consistency. He has given proof, as scarce any other modern writer has done, of tireless constancy of resolve. His novels formed an unbroken series from the *Desperate Remedies* of 1871 to *The Well-Beloved* of 1897. In the fulness of his success, and unseduced by all temptation, he closed that chapter of his career, and has kept it closed. Since 1898 he has been, persistently and periodically, a poet and nothing else. That he determined, for reasons best left to his own judgment, to defer the exhibition of his verse until he had completed his work in prose, ought not to prejudice criticism in its analysis of the lyrics and the colossal dramatic panorama. Mr. Hardy, exclusively as a poet, demands our undivided attention.

It is legitimate to speculate on other probable causes of Mr. Hardy's delay. From such information as lies scattered before us, we gather that it was from 1865 to 1867 that he originally took poetry to be his vocation. The dated pieces in the volume of 1898 help us to form an idea of the original character of his utterance. On the whole it was very much what it remains in the pieces composed after a lapse of half a century. Already, as a very young man, Mr. Hardy possessed his extraordinary insight into the movements of human character, and his eloquence in translating what he had observed of the tragedy and pain of rustic lives. No one, for sixty years, had taken so closely to heart the admonitions of Wordsworth in his famous Preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* to seek for

inspiration in that condition where "the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful forms of nature." But it may well be doubted whether Mr. Hardy's poems would have been received in the mid-Victorian age with favour, or even have been comprehended. Fifty years ahead of his time, he was asking in 1866 for novelty of ideas, and he must have been conscious that his questioning would seem inopportune. He needed a different atmosphere, and he left the task of revolt to another, and, at first sight, a very unrelated force, that of the *Poems and Ballads* of the same year. But Swinburne succeeded in his revolution, and although he approached the art from an opposite direction, he prepared the way for an ultimate appreciation of Mr. Hardy.

We should therefore regard the latter, in spite of his silence of forty years, as a poet who laboured, like Swinburne, at a revolution against the optimism and superficial sweetness of his age. Swinburne, it is true, tended to accentuate the poetic side of poetry, while Mr. Hardy drew verse, in some verbal respects, nearer to prose. This does not affect their common attitude, and the sympathy of these great artists for one another's work has already been revealed, and will be still more clearly exposed. But they were unknown to each other in 1866, when to both of them the cheap philosophy of the moment, the glittering femininity of the "jewelled line," the intense respect for Mrs. Grundy in her Sunday satin, appeared trumpery, hateful, and to be trampled upon. We find in Mr. Hardy's earliest verse no echo of the passionate belief in personal immortality which was professed by Ruskin and Browning. He opposed the Victorian theory of human "progress"; the Tennysonian beatific Vision seemed to him ridiculous. He rejected the idea of the sympathy and goodness of Nature, and was in revolt against the self-centredness of the Romantics. We may conjecture that he combined a

great reverence for *The Book of Job* with a considerable contempt for *In Memoriam.*

This was not a mere rebellious fancy which passed off; it was something inherent that remained, and gives to-day their peculiar character to Mr. Hardy's latest lyrics. But before we examine the features of this personal mode of interpreting poetry to the world, we may collect what little light we can on the historic development of it. In the pieces dated between 1865 and 1867 we find the germ of almost everything which has since characterised the poet. In "Amabel" the ruinous passage of years, which has continued to be an obsession with Mr. Hardy, is already crudely dealt with. The habit of taking poetical negatives of small scenes—"your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree, and a pond edged with grayish leaves" ("Neutral Times")—which had not existed in English verse since the days of Crabbe, reappears. There is marked already a sense of terror and resentment against the blind motions of chance—In "Hap" the author would positively welcome a certainty of divine hatred as a relief from the strain of depending upon "crass casualty." Here and there in these earliest pieces an extreme difficulty of utterance is remarkable in the face of the ease which the poet attained afterwards in the expression of his most strange images and fantastic revelations. We read in "At a Bridal":—

> "Should I, too, wed as slave to Mode's decree,
> And each thus found apart, of false desire
> A stolid line, whom no high aims will fire
> As had fired ours could ever have mingled we!"

This, although perfectly reducible, takes time to think out, and at a hasty glance seems muffled up in obscurity beyond the darkness of Donne; moreover, it is scarcely worthy in form of the virtuoso which Mr. Hardy was presently to become. Perhaps of the poems certainly

attributable to this earliest period, the little cycle of sonnets called "She to Him" gives clearest promise of what was coming. The sentiment is that of Ronsard's famous "Quand vous serez bien vieille, au soir, à la chandelle," but turned round, as Mr. Hardy loves to do, from the man to the woman, and embroidered with ingenuities, such as where the latter says that as her temperament dies down the habit of loving will remain, and she be

> "Numb as a vane that cankers on its point,
> True to the wind that kissed ere canker came,"

which attest a complexity of mind that Ronsard's society knew nothing of.

On the whole, we may perhaps be safe in conjecturing that whatever the cause, the definite dedication to verse was now postponed. Meanwhile, the writing of novels had become the business of Mr. Hardy's life, and ten years go by before we trace a poet in that life again. But it is interesting to find that when the great success of *Far from the Madding Crowd* had introduced him to a circle of the best readers, there followed an effect which again disturbed his ambition for the moment. Mr. Hardy was once more tempted to change the form of his work. He wished "to get back to verse," but was dissuaded by Leslie Stephen, who induced him to start writing *The Return of the Native* instead. On March 29th, 1875, Coventry Patmore, then a complete stranger, wrote to express his regret that "such almost unequalled beauty and power as appeared in the novels should not have assured themselves the immortality which would have been conferred upon them by the form of verse." This was just at the moment when we find Mr. Hardy's conversations with "long Leslie Stephen in the velveteen coat" obstinately turning upon "theologies decayed and defunct, the origin of things, the constitution of matter, and the unreality of time."

To this period belongs also the earliest conception of *The Dynasts*, an old note-book containing, under the date June 20th, 1875, the suggestion that the author should attempt "An Iliad of Europe from 1789 to 1815."

To this time also seems to belong the execution of what has proved the most attractive section of Mr. Hardy's poetry, the narratives, or short Wessex ballads. The method in which these came into the world is very curious. Many of these stories were jotted down to the extent of a stanza or two when the subject first occurred to the author. For instance, "The Fire at Tranter Sweatley's," first published by Lionel Johnson in 1894, had been begun as early as 1867, and was finished ten years later. The long ballad of "Leipzig" and the savage "San Sebastian," both highly characteristic, were also conceived and a few lines of each noted down long before their completion. "Valenciennes," however, belongs to 1878, and the "Dance at the Phœnix," of which the stanza beginning "'Twas Christmas" alone had been written years before, seems to have been finished about the same time. What evidence is before us goes to prove that in the 'seventies Mr. Hardy became a complete master of the art of verse, and that his poetic style was by this time fixed. He still kept poetry out of public sight, but he wrote during the next twenty years, as though in a backwater off the stream of his novels, the poems which form the greater part of the volume of 1898. If no other collection of his lyrical verse existed, we should miss a multitude of fine things, but our general conception of his genius would be little modified.

We should judge carelessly, however, if we treated the subsequent volumes as mere repetitions of the original *Wessex Poems*. They present interesting differences, which I may rapidly note before I touch on the features which characterise the whole body of Mr. Hardy's verse. *Poems of the Past and Present*, which came out in the first

days of 1902, could not but be in a certain measure disappointing, in so far as it paralleled its three years' product with that of the thirty years of *Wessex Poems*. Old pieces were published in it, and it was obvious that in 1898 Mr. Hardy might be expected to have chosen from what used to be called his "portfolio" those specimens which he thought to be most attractive. But on further inspection this did not prove to be quite the case. After pondering for twelve years on the era of Napoleon, his preoccupation began in 1887 to drive him into song:—

> "Must I pipe a palinody,
> Or be silent thereupon?"

He decides that silence has become impossible:—

> "Nay; I'll sing 'The Bridge of Lodi'—
> That long-loved, romantic thing,
> Though none show by smile or nod, he
> Guesses why and what I sing!"

Here is the germ of *The Dynasts*. But in the meantime the crisis of the Boer War had cut across the poet's dream of Europe a hundred years ago, and a group of records of the Dorsetshire elements of the British army at the close of 1899 showed in Mr. Hardy's poetry what had not been suspected there—a military talent of a most remarkable kind. Another set of pieces composed in Rome were not so interesting; Mr. Hardy always seems a little languid when he leaves the confines of his native Wessex. Another section of *Poems of the Past and Present* is severely, almost didactically, metaphysical, and expands in varied language the daring thought, so constantly present in Mr. Hardy's reverie, that God Himself has forgotten the existence of earth, this "tiny sphere," this "tainted ball," "so poor a thing," and has left all human life to be the plaything of blind chance. This sad conviction is hardly ruffled by "The Darkling Thrush," which goes as far towards

optimism as Mr. Hardy can let himself be drawn, or by such reflections as those in "On a Fine Morning":—

"Whence comes Solace? Not from seeing
What is doing, suffering, being;
Not from noting Life's conditions,
Not from heeding Time's monitions;
But in cleaving to the Dream,
And in gazing on the gleam
Whereby gray things golden seem."

Eight years more passed, years marked by the stupendous effort of *The Dynasts*, before Mr. Hardy put forth another collection of lyrical poems. *Time's Laughingstocks* confirmed, and more than confirmed, the high promise of *Wessex Poems*. The author, in one of his modest prefaces, where he seems to whisper while we bend forward in our anxiety not to miss one thrifty sentence, expresses the hope that *Time's Laughingstocks* will, as a whole, take the "reader forward, even if not far, rather than backward."

The book, indeed, does not take us "far" forward, simply because the writer's style and scope were definitely exposed to us already, and yet it does take us "forward," because the hand of the master is conspicuously firmer and his touch more daring. The *Laughingstocks* themselves are fifteen in number, tragical stories of division and isolation, of failures in passion, of the treason of physical decay. No landscape of Mr. Hardy's had been more vivid than the night-pictures in "The Revisitation," where the old soldier in barracks creeps out on to the gaunt down, and meets (by one of Mr. Hardy's coincidences) his ancient mistress, and no picture more terrible than the revelation of each to the other in a blaze of sunrise. What a document for the future is "Reminiscences of a Dancing Man"? If only Shakespeare could have left us such a song of the London in 1585! But the power of the poet culminates in the pathos of "The Tramp Woman"—perhaps the

greatest of all Mr. Hardy's lyrical poems—and in the horror of " A Sunday Morning's Tragedy."

It is noticeable that *Time's Laughingstocks* is, in some respects, a more daring collection than its predecessors. We find the poet here entirely emancipated from convention, and guided both in religion and morals exclusively by the inner light of his reflection. His energy now interacts on his clairvoyance with a completeness which he had never quite displayed before, and it is here that we find Mr. Hardy's utterance peculiarly a quintessence of himself. Especially in the narrative pieces—which are often Wessex novels distilled into a wine-glass, such as " Rose-Ann," and " The Vampirine Fair"—he allows no considerations of what the reader may think " nice" or " pleasant" to shackle his sincerity or his determination; and it is therefore to *Time's Laughingstocks* that the reader who wishes to become intimately acquainted with Mr. Hardy as a moralist most frequently recurs. We notice here more than elsewhere in his poems Mr. Hardy's sympathy with the local music of Wessex, and especially with its expression by the village choir, which he uses as a spiritual symbol. Quite a large section of *Time's Laughingstocks* takes us to the old-fashioned gallery of some church, where the minstrels are bowing " New Sabbath" or " Mount Ephraim," or to a later scene where the ghosts, in whose melancholy apparition Mr. Hardy takes such pleasure, chant their goblin melodies and strum " the viols of the dead" in the moonlit churchyard. The very essence of Mr. Hardy's reverie at this moment of his career is to be found, for instance, in " The Dead Quire," where the ancient phantom-minstrels revenge themselves on their gross grandsons outside the alehouse.

Almost immediately after the outbreak of the present war Mr. Hardy presented to a somewhat distraught and inattentive public another collection of his poems. It

cannot be said that *Satires of Circumstance* is the most satisfactory of those volumes; it is, perhaps, that which we could with the least discomposure persuade ourselves to overlook. Such a statement refers more to the high quality of other pages than to any positive decay of power or finish here. There is no less adroitness of touch and penetration of view in this book than elsewhere, and the poet awakens once more our admiration by his skill in giving poetic value to minute conditions of life which have escaped less careful observers. But in *Satires of Circumstance* the ugliness of experience is more accentuated than it is elsewhere, and is flung in our face with less compunction. The pieces which give name to the volume are only fifteen in number, but the spirit which inspires them is very frequently repeated in other parts of the collection. That spirit is one of mocking sarcasm, and it acts in every case by presenting a beautifully draped figure of illusion, from which the poet, like a sardonic showman, twitches away the robe that he may display a skeleton beneath it.

We can with little danger assume, as we read the *Satires of Circumstance*, hard and cruel shafts of searchlight as they seem, that Mr. Hardy was passing through a mental crisis when he wrote them. This seems to be the *Troilus and Cressida* of his life's work, the book in which he is revealed most distracted by conjecture and most overwhelmed by the miscarriage of everything. The wells of human hope have been poisoned for him by some condition of which we know nothing, and even the picturesque features of Dorsetshire landscape, that have always before dispersed his melancholy, fail to win his attention :—

> " Bright yellowhammers
> Made mirthful clamours,
> And billed long straws with a bustling air,
> And bearing their load,
> Flew up the road
> That he followed alone, without interest there."

The strongest of the poems of disillusion which are the outcome of this mood, is "The Newcomer's Wife," with the terrible abruptness of its last stanza. It is not for criticism to find fault with the theme of a work of art, but only to comment upon its execution. Of the merit of these monotonously sinister *Satires of Circumstance* there can be no question; whether the poet's indulgence in the mood which gave birth to them does not tend to lower our moral temperature and to lessen the rebound of our energy, is another matter. At all events, every one must welcome a postscript in which a blast on the bugle of war seemed to have wakened the poet from his dark brooding to the sense of a new chapter in history.

In the fourth year of the war the veteran poet published *Moments of Vision*. These show a remarkable recovery of spirit, and an ingenuity never before excelled. With the passage of years Mr. Hardy, observing everything in the little world of Wessex, and forgetting nothing, has become almost preternaturally wise, and, if it may be said so, "knowing," with a sort of magic, like that of a wizard. He has learned to track the windings of the human heart with the familiarity of a gamekeeper who finds plenty of vermin in the woods, and who nails what he finds, be it stoat or squirrel, to the barn-door of his poetry. But there is also in these last-fruits of Mr. Hardy's mossed tree much that is wholly detached from the bitterness of satire, much that simply records, with an infinite delicacy of pathos, little incidents of the personal life of long ago, bestowing the immortality of art on these fugitive fancies in the spirit of the Japanese sculptor when he chisels the melting of a cloud or the flight of an insect on his sword hilt:—

"I idly cut a parsley stalk
  And blew therein towards the moon;
I had not thought what ghosts would walk
  With shivering footsteps to my tune.

"I went and knelt, and scooped my hand
As if to drink, into the brook,
And a faint figure seemed to stand
Above me, with the bye-gone look.

"I lipped rough rhymes of chance not choice,
I thought not what my words might be;
There came into my ear a voice
That turned a tenderer verse for me."

We have now in brief historic survey marshalled before us the various volumes in which Mr. Hardy's lyrical poetry was originally collected. Before we examine its general character more closely, it may be well to call attention to its technical quality, which was singularly misunderstood at first, and which has never, we believe, been boldly faced. In 1898, and later, when a melodious *falsetto* was much in fashion amongst us, the reviewers found great fault with Mr. Hardy's prosody; they judged him as a versifier to be rude and incorrect. As regards the single line, it may be confessed that Mr. Hardy, in his anxiety to present his thought in an undiluted form, is not infrequently clogged and hard. Such a line as

"Fused from its separateness by ecstasy"

hisses at us like a snake, and crawls like a wounded one. Mr. Hardy is apt to clog his lines with consonants, and he seems indifferent to the stiffness which is the consequence of this neglect. Ben Jonson said that "Donne, for not keeping of accent, deserved hanging"; perhaps we may go so far as to say that Mr. Hardy, for his indifference to a mellifluous run lays himself open to a mild rebuke. He is negligent of that eternal ornament of English verse, audible intricacy, probably because of Swinburne's abuse of it. But most of what is called his harshness should rather be called bareness, and is the result of a revolt, conscious or unconscious, against Keats' prescription of "loading the rifts with ore."

In saying this, all has been said that an enemy could in justice say in blame of his metrical peculiarities. Unquestionably he does occasionally, like Robert Browning, err in the direction of cacophony. But when we turn to the broader part of prosody, we must perceive that Mr. Hardy is not only a very ingenious, but a very correct and admirable metricist. His stanzaic invention is abundant; no other Victorian poet, not even Swinburne, has employed so many forms, mostly of his own invention, and employed them so appropriately, that is to say, in so close harmony with the subject or story enshrined in them. To take an example from his pure lyrics of reflection first, from "The Bullfinches":—

> "Brother Bulleys, let us sing
> From the dawn till evening!
> For we know not that we go not
> When the day's pale visions fold
> Unto those who sang of old,"

in the exquisite fineness and sadness of the stanza we seem to hear the very voices of the birds warbling faintly in the sunset. Again, the hurried, timid irresolution of a lover always too late is marvellously rendered in the form of "Lizbie Browne":—

> "And Lizbie Browne,
> Who else had hair
> Bay-red as yours,
> Or flesh so fair
> Bred out of doors,
> Sweet Lizbie Browne?"

On the other hand, the fierceness of "I said to Love" is interpreted in a stanza that suits the mood of denunciation, while "Tess's Lament" wails in a metre which seems to rock like an ageing woman seated alone before the fire, with an infinite haunting sadness.

It is, however, in the narrative pieces, the little *Wessex*

Tales, that Mr. Hardy's metrical imagination is most triumphant. No two of these are identical in form, and for each he selects, or more often invents, a wholly appropriate stanza. He makes many experiments, one of the strangest being the introduction of rhymeless lines at regular intervals. Of this, "Cicely" is an example which repays attention:—

> "And still sadly onward I followed,
> That Highway the Icen
> Which trails its pale riband down Wessex
> O'er lynchet and lea.
>
> "Along through the Stour-bordered Forum,
> Where legions had wayfared,
> And where the slow river up-glasses
> Its green canopy";

and one still more remarkable is the enchanting "Friends Beyond," to which we shall presently recur. The drawling voice of a weary old campaigner is wonderfully rendered in the stanza of "Valenciennes":—

> "Well: Heaven wi' its jasper halls
> Is now the on'y town I care to be in . . .
> Good Lord, if Nick should bomb the walls
> As we did Valencieën!"

whereas for long Napoleonic stories like "Leipzig" and "The Peasant's Confession," a ballad-measure which contemporaries such as Southey or Campbell might have used is artfully chosen. In striking contrast we have the elaborate verse-form of "The Souls of the Slain," in which the throbbing stanza seems to dilate and withdraw like the very cloud of moth-like phantoms which it describes. It is difficult to follow out this theme without more frequent quotation than I have space for here, but the reader who pursues it carefully will not repeat the rumour that Mr. Hardy is a careless or "incorrect" metricist. He is, on the contrary, a metrical artist of great accomplishment.

The conception of life revealed in his verses by this careful artist is one which displays very exactly the bent of his temperament. During the whole of his long career Mr. Hardy has not budged an inch from his original line of direction. He holds that, abandoned by God, treated with scorn by Nature, man lies helpless at the mercy of "those purblind Doomsters," accident, chance, and time, from whom he has had to endure injury and insult from the cradle to the grave. This is stating the Hardy doctrine in its extreme form, but it is not stating it too strongly. This has been called his "pessimism," a phrase to which some admirers, unwilling to give things their true name, have objected. But, of course, Mr. Hardy is a pessimist, just as Browning is an optimist, just as white is not black, and day is not night. Our juggling with words in paradox is too often apt to disguise a want of decision in thought. Let us admit that Mr. Hardy's conception of the fatal forces which beleaguer human life is a "pessimistic" one, or else words have no meaning.

Yet it is needful to define in what this pessimism consists. It is not the egotism of Byron or the morbid melancholy of Chateaubriand. It is directed towards an observation of others, not towards an analysis of self, and this gives it more philosophical importance, because although romantic peevishness is very common among modern poets, and although ennui inspires a multitude of sonnets, a deliberate and imaginative study of useless suffering in the world around us is rare indeed among the poets. It is particularly to be noted that Mr. Hardy, although one of the most profoundly tragic of all modern writers, is neither effeminate nor sickly. His melancholy could never have dictated the third stanza of Shelley's "Lines written in Dejection in the Bay of Naples." His pessimism is involuntary, forced from him by his experience and his constitution, and no analysis could give a better definition

of what divides him from the petulant despair of a poet like Leopardi than the lines "To Life":—

> "O life, with the sad scared face,
> I weary of seeing thee,
> And thy draggled cloak, and thy hobbling pace,
> And thy too-forced pleasantry!
>
> "I know what thou would'st tell
> Of Death, Time, Destiny—
> I have known it long, and know, too, well
> What it all means for me.
>
> "But canst thou not array
> Thyself in rare disguise,
> And feign like truth, for one mad day,
> That Earth is Paradise?
>
> "I'll tune me to the mood,
> And mumm with thee till eve,
> And maybe what as interlude
> I feign, I shall believe!"

But the mumming goes no deeper than it does in the exquisite poem of "The Darkling Thrush," where the carolings of an aged bird, on a frosty evening, are so ecstatic that they waken a vague hope in the listener's mind that the thrush may possibly know of "some blessed hope" of which the poet is "unaware." This is as far as Mr. Hardy ever gets on the blest Victorian pathway of satisfaction.

There are certain aspects in which it is not unnatural to see a parallel between Mr. Hardy and George Crabbe. Each is the spokesman of a district, each has a passion for the study of mankind, each has gained by long years of observation a profound knowledge of local human character, and each has plucked on the open moor, and wears in his coat, the hueless flower of disillusion. But there is a great distinction in the aim of the two poets. Crabbe, as he describes himself in *The Parish Register*, was "the true physician" who "walks the foulest ward." He was utilitarian in his morality; he exposed the pathos of tragedy by dwelling on the faults which led to it, forgetful of the

fatality which in more consistent moments he acknowledged. Crabbe was realistic with a moral design, even in the *Tales of the Hall*, where he made a gallant effort at last to arrive at a detachment of spirit. No such effort is needed by Mr. Hardy, who has none of the instinct of a preacher, and who considers moral improvement outside his responsibility. He admits, with his great French contemporary, that

> "Tout désir est menteur, toute joie éphémère,
> Toute liqueur au fond de la coupe est amère,"

but he is bent on discovering the cause of this devastation, and not disposed to waste time over its consequences. At the end he produces a panacea which neither Crabbe nor Byron dreamed of—resignation.

But the poet has not reached the end of his disillusion. He thinks to secure repose on the breast of Nature, the *alma mater*, to whom Goethe and Wordsworth and Browning each in his own way turned, and were rewarded by consolation and refreshment. We should be prepared to find Mr. Hardy, with his remarkable aptitude for the perception of natural forms, easily consoled by the influences of landscape and the inanimate world. His range of vision is wide and extremely exact; he has the gift of reproducing before us scenes of various character with a vividness which is sometimes startling. But Mr. Hardy's disdain of sentimentality, and his vigorous analysis of the facts of life, render him insensible not indeed to the mystery nor to the beauty, but to the imagined sympathy, of Nature. He has no more confidence in the visible earth than in the invisible heavens, and neither here nor there is he able to persuade himself to discover a counsellor or a friend. In this connection, we do well to follow the poet's train of thought in the lyric called "In a Wood," where he enters a copse dreaming that, in that realm of "sylvan peace," Nature

would offer "a soft release from man's unrest." He immediately observes that the pine and the beech are struggling for existence, and trying to blight each other with dripping poison. He sees the ivy eager to strangle the elm, and the hawthorns choking the hollies. Even the poplars sulk and turn black under the shadow of a rival. In the end, filled with horror at all these crimes of Nature, the poet flees from the copse as from an accursed place, and he determines that life offers him no consolation except the company of those human beings who are as beleaguered as himself :—

> "Since, then, no grace I find
> Taught me of trees,
> Turn I back to my kind
> Worthy as these.
> There at least smiles abound,
> There discourse trills around,
> There, now and then, are found,
> Life-loyalties."

It is absurd, he decides, to love Nature, which has either no response to give, or answers in irony. Let us even avoid, as much as we can, deep concentration of thought upon the mysteries of Nature, lest we become demoralised by contemplating her negligence, her blindness, her implacability. We find here a violent reaction against the poetry of egotistic optimism which had ruled the romantic school in England for more than a hundred years, and we recognise a branch of Mr. Hardy's originality. He has lifted the veil of Isis, and he finds beneath it, not a benevolent mother of men, but the tomb of an illusion. One short lyric, "Yell'ham-Wood's Story," puts this, again with a sylvan setting, in its unflinching crudity :—

> "Coomb-Firtrees say that Life is a moan,
> And Clyffe-hill Clump says 'Yea!'
> But Yell'ham says a thing of its own:
> It's not, 'Gray, gray,
> Is Life alway!'
> That Yell'ham says,
> Nor that Life is for ends unknown.

> "It says that Life would signify
> A thwarted purposing :
> That we come to live, and are called to die.
> Yes, that's the thing
> In fall, in spring,
> That Yell'ham says :—
> 'Life offers—to deny !'"

It is therefore almost exclusively to the obscure history of those who suffer and stumble around him, victims of the universal disillusion, men and women "come to live but called to die," that Mr. Hardy dedicates his poetic function. "Lizbie Browne" appeals to us as a typical instance of his rustic pathos, his direct and poignant tenderness, and if we compare it with such poems of Wordsworth's as "Lucy Gray" or "Alice Fell" we see that he starts by standing much closer to the level of the subject than his great predecessor does. Wordsworth is the benevolent philosopher sitting in a post-chaise or crossing the "wide moor" in meditation. Mr. Hardy is the familiar neighbour, the shy mourner at the grave; his relation is a more intimate one: he is patient, humble, un-upbraiding. Sometimes, as in the remarkable colloquy called "The Ruined Maid," his sympathy is so close as to offer an absolute flout in the face to the system of Victorian morality. Mr. Hardy, indeed, is not concerned with sentimental morals, but with the primitive instincts of the soul, applauding them, or at least recording them with complacency, even when they outrage ethical tradition, as they do in the lyric narrative called "A Wife and Another." The stanzas "To an Unborn Pauper Child" sum up what is sinister and what is genial in Mr. Hardy's attitude to the unambitious forms of life which he loves to contemplate.

His temperature is not always so low as it is in the class of poems to which we have just referred, but his ultimate view is never more sanguine. He is pleased sometimes to act as the fiddler at a dance, surveying the hot-blooded

couples, and urging them on by the lilt of his instrument, but he is always perfectly aware that they will have "to pay high for their prancing" at the end of all. No instance of this is more remarkable than the poem called "Julie-Jane," a perfect example of Mr. Hardy's metrical ingenuity and skill, which begins thus:—

"Sing; how 'a would sing!
How 'a would raise the tune
When we rode in the waggon from harvesting
By the light o' the moon!

"Dance; how 'a would dance!
If a fiddlestring did but sound
She would hold out her coats, give a slanting glance,
And go round and round.

"Laugh; how 'a would laugh!
Her peony lips would part
As if none such a place for a lover to quaff
At the deeps of a heart,"

and which then turns to the most plaintive and the most irreparable tragedy, woven, as a black design on to a background of gold, upon this basis of temperamental joyousness.

Alphonse Daudet once said that the great gift of Edmond de Goncourt was to "*rendre l'irrendable.*" This is much more true of Mr. Hardy than it was of Goncourt, and more true than it is of any other English poet except Donne. There is absolutely no observation too minute, no flutter of reminiscence too faint, for Mr. Hardy to adopt as the subject of a metaphysical lyric, and his skill in this direction has grown upon him; it is nowhere so remarkable as in his latest volume, aptly termed *Moments of Vision*. Everything in village life is grist to his mill; he seems to make no selection, and his field is modest to humility and yet practically boundless. We have a poem on the attitude of two people with nothing to do and no book to read, waiting in the parlour of an hotel for the rain to stop, a

recollection after more than forty years. That the poet once dropped a pencil into the cranny of an old church where he was sketching inspires an elaborate lyric. The disappearance of a rotted summer-house, the look of a row of silver drops of fog condensed on the bar of a gate, the effect of candlelight years and years ago on a woman's neck and hair, the vision of a giant at a fair, led by a dwarf with a red string—such are amongst the subjects which awaken in Mr. Hardy thoughts which do often lie too deep for tears, and call for interpretation in verse. The skeleton of a lady's sunshade, picked up on Swanage Cliffs, the pages of a fly-blown Testament lying in a railway waiting-room, a journeying boy in a third-class carriage, with his ticket stuck in the band of his hat—such are among the themes which awake in Mr. Hardy's imagination reveries which are always wholly serious and usually deeply tragic.

Mr. Hardy's notation of human touches hitherto excluded from the realm of poetry is one of the most notable features of his originality. It marked his work from the beginning, as in the early ballad of "The Widow," where the sudden damping of the wooer's amatory ardour in consequence of his jealousy of the child is rendered with extraordinary refinement. The difficulty of course is to know when to stop. There is always a danger that a poet, in his search after the infinitely ingenious, may lapse into *amphigory*, into sheer absurdity and triviality, which Cowper, in spite of his elegant lightness, does not always escape. Wordsworth, more serious in his intent, fell headlong in parts of *Peter Bell*, and in such ballads as "Betty Foy." Mr. Hardy, whatever the poverty of his incident, commonly redeems it by the oddity of his observation; as in "The Pedigree":—

"I bent in the deep of night
Over a pedigree the chronicler gave
As mine; and as I bent there, half-unrobed,

The uncurtained panes of my window-square
Let in the watery light
Of the moon in its old age:
And green-rheumed clouds were hurrying past
Where mute and cold it globed
Like a dying dolphin's eye seen through a lapping wave."

Mr. Hardy's love of strange experiences, and of adve tures founded on a balance of conscience and instinct, constantly exemplified in those ballads and verse-anecdot which form the section of his poetry most appreciated b the general public. Among these, extraordinarily represe tative of the poet's habit of mind, is "My Cicely," a ta of the eighteenth century, where a man impetuousl rides from London through Wessex to be present at th funeral of the wrong woman; as he returns, by a coincidenc he meets the right woman, whom he used to love, and horrified at "her liquor-fired face, her thick accents. He determines that by an effort of will the dead woma (whom he never saw) shall remain, what she seemed durin his wild ride, "*my* Cicely," and the living woman b expunged from memory. A similar deliberate electin that the dream shall hold the place of the fact is the motiv of "The Well-Beloved." The ghastly humour of "Th Curate's Kindness" is a sort of reverse action of the sam mental subtlety. Misunderstanding takes a very promine place in Mr. Hardy's irony of circumstance; as, almost to painfully, in "The Rash Bride," a hideous tale of suicid following on the duplicity of a tender and innocent widow

The grandmother of Mr. Hardy was born in 1772, an survived until 1857. From her lips he heard many a obscure old legend of the life of Wessex in the eighteent century. Was it she who told him the terrible Exmoo story of "The Sacrilege;" the early tale of "The Tw Men," which might be the skeleton-scenario for a whol elaborate novel; or that incomparable comedy in verse "The Fire at Tranter Sweatley's," with its splendid huma

touch at the very end? We suspect that it was; and perhaps at the same source he acquired his dangerous insight into the female heart, whether exquisitely feeble as in "The Home-coming" with its delicate and ironic surprise, or treacherous, as in the desolating ballad of "Rose-Ann." No one, in prose or verse, has expatiated more poignantly than Mr. Hardy on what our forefathers used to call "cases of conscience." He seems to have shared the experiences of souls to whom life was "a wood before your doors, and a labyrinth within the wood, and locks and bars to every door within that labyrinth," as Jeremy Taylor describes that of the anxious penitents who came to him to confession. The probably very early story of "The Casterbridge Captains" is a delicate study in compunction, and a still more important example is "The Alarm," where the balance of conscience and instinct gives to what in coarser hands might seem the most trivial of actions a momentous character of tragedy.

This is one of Mr. Hardy's studies in military history, where he is almost always singularly happy. His portraits of the non-commissioned officer of the old service are as excellent in verse as they are in the prose of *The Trumpet-Major* or *The Melancholy Hussar*. The reader of the novels will not have to be reminded that "Valenciennes" and the other ballads have their prose-parallel in Simon Burden's reminiscences of Minden. Mr. Hardy, with a great curiosity about the science of war and a close acquaintance with the mind of the common soldier, has pondered on the philosophy of fighting. "The Man he Killed," written in 1902, expresses the wonder of the rifleman who is called upon to shoot his brother-in-arms, although

"Had he and I but met,
By some old ancient inn,
We should have set us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin'

In this connection the *Poems of War and Patriotism* which form an important part of the volume of 1918 should be carefully examined by those who meditate o the tremendous problems of the moment.

A poet so profoundly absorbed in the study of life coul not fail to speculate on the probabilities of immortality Here Mr. Hardy presents to us his habitual serenity i negation. He sees the beautiful human body "lined b tool of time," and he asks what becomes of it when it dissolution is complete. He sees no evidence of a consciou state after death, of what would have to be, in the case o aged or exhausted persons, a revival of spiritual force and on the whole he is disinclined to cling to the faith i a future life. He holds that the immortality of a dead ma resides in the memory of the living, his "finer part shinin within ever-faithful hearts of those bereft." He pursue this theme in a large number of his most serious an affecting lyrics, most gravely perhaps in "The To-be Forgotten" and in "The Superseded." This sense of th forlorn condition of the dead, surviving only in the dwindlin memory of the living, inspires what has some claims to b considered the loveliest of all Mr. Hardy's poems, "Friend Beyond," which in its tenderness, its humour, and it pathos contains in a few pages every characteristic of hi genius.

His speculation perceives the dead as a crowd of slowl vanishing phantoms, clustering in their ineffectual longin round the footsteps of those through whom alone the continue to exist. This conception has inspired Mr. Hard with several wonderful visions, among which the spectacl of "The Souls of the Slain" in the Boer War, alighting like vast flights of moths, over Portland Bill at night, i the most remarkable. It has the sublimity and much o the character of some apocalyptic design by Blake. Th volume of 1902 contains a whole group of phantasma

pieces of this kind, where there is frequent mention of spectres, who address the poet in the accents of nature, as in the unrhymed ode called "The Mother Mourns." The obsession of old age, with its physical decay ("I look into my glass"), the inevitable division which leads to that isolation which the poet regards as the greatest of adversities ("The Impercipient"), the tragedies of moral indecision, the contrast between the tangible earth and the bodyless ghosts, and endless repetition of the cry, "Why find we us here?" and of the question "Has some Vast Imbecility framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?"—all start from the overwhelming love of physical life and acquaintance with its possibilities, which Mr. Hardy possesses to an inordinate degree.

It would be ridiculous at the close of an essay to attempt any discussion of the huge dramatic panorama which many believe to be Mr. Hardy's most weighty contribution to English literature. The spacious theatre of *The Dynasts* with its comprehensive and yet concise realisations of vast passages of human history, is a work which calls for a commentary as lengthy as itself, and yet needs no commentary at all. No work of the imagination is more its own interpreter than this sublime historic peep-show, this rolling vision of the Napoleonic chronicle drawn on the broadest lines, and yet in detail made up of intensely concentrated and vivid glimpses of reality. But the subject of my present study, the lyrical poetry of Mr. Hardy, is not largely illustrated in *The Dynasts*, except by the choral interludes of the phantom intelligences, which have great lyrical value, and by three or four admirable songs.

When we resume the effect which the poetry of Mr. Hardy makes upon the careful reader, we note, as I have indicated already, a sense of unity of direction throughout. Mr. Hardy has expressed himself in a thousand ways, but

has never altered his vision. From 1867 to 1917, through half a century of imaginative creation, he has not modified the large outlines of his art in the smallest degree. To early readers of his poems, before the full meaning of them became evident, his voice sounded inharmonious, because it did not fit in with the exquisite melodies of the later Victorian age. But Mr. Hardy, with characteristic pertinacity, did not attempt to alter his utterance in the least, and now we can all perçeive, if we take the trouble to do so, that what seemed harsh in his poetry was his peculiar and personal mode of interpreting his thoughts to the world.

As in his novels so in his poems, Mr. Hardy has chosen to remain local, to be the interpreter for present and future times of one rich and neglected province of the British realm. From his standpoint there he contemplates the wide aspect of life, but it seems huge and misty to him, and he broods over the tiny incidents of Wessex idiosyncracy. His irony is audacious and even sardonic, and few poets have been less solicitous to please their weaker brethren. But no poet of modern times has been more careful to avoid the abstract and to touch upon the real.

SOME SOLDIER POETS

SOME SOLDIER POETS

THE two years which preceded the outbreak of the war were marked in this country by a revival of public interest in the art of poetry. To this movement coherence was given and organisation introduced by Mr. Edward Marsh's now-famous volume entitled *Georgian Poetry*. The effect of this collection—for it is hardly correct to call it an anthology—of the best poems written by the youngest poets since 1911 was two-fold; it acquainted readers with work few had "the leisure or the zeal to investigate," and it brought the writers themselves together in a corporate and selected relation. I do not recollect that this had been done—except prematurely and partially by *The Germ* of 1850—since the *England's Parnassus* and *England's Helicon* of 1600. In point of fact the only real precursor of Mr. Marsh's venture in our whole literature is the *Songs and Sonnettes* of 1557, commonly known as *Tottel's Miscellany*. Tottel brought together, for the first time, the lyrics of Wyatt, Surrey, Churchyard, Vaux, and Bryan, exactly as Mr. Marsh called public attention to Rupert Brooke, James Elroy Flecker and the rest of the Georgians, and he thereby fixed the names of those poets, as Mr. Marsh has fixed those of our youngest fledglings, on the roll of English literature.

The general tone of the latest poetry, up to the moment of the outbreak of hostilities, was pensive, instinct with natural piety, given somewhat in excess to description of landscape, tender in feeling, essentially unaggressive except towards the clergy and towards other versifiers of an

earlier generation. There was absolutely not a trace in any one of the young poets of that arrogance and vociferous defiance which marked German verse during the same years. These English shepherds might hit at their elders with their staves, but they had turned their swords into pruning-hooks and had no scabbards to rattle. This is a point which might have attracted notice, if we had not all been too drowsy in the lap of our imperial prosperity to observe the signs of the times in Berlin. Why did no one call our attention to the beating of the big drum which was going on so briskly on the Teutonic Parnassus? At all events, there was no echo of such a noise in the "chambers of imagery" which contained Mr. Gordon Bottomley, or in Mr. W. H. Davies' wandering "songs of joy," or on "the great hills and solemn chanting seas" where Mr. John Drinkwater waited for the advent of beauty. And the guns of August 1914 found Mr. W. W. Gibson encompassed by "one dim, blue infinity of starry peace." There is a sort of German *Georgian Poetry* in existence; in time to come a comparison of its pages with those of Mr. Marsh may throw a side-light on the question, Who prepared the War?

The youngest poets were more completely taken by surprise in August 1914 than their elders. The earliest expressions of lyric military feeling came from veteran voices. It was only proper that the earliest of all should be the Poet Laureate's address to England, ending with the prophecy :—

"Much suffering shall cleanse thee!
  But thou through the flood
Shalt win to Salvation,
  To Beauty through blood."

As sensation, however, followed sensation in those first terrific and bewildering weeks, much was happening that

called forth with the utmost exuberance the primal emotions of mankind; there was full occasion for

> "exultations, agonies,
> And love, and man's unconquerable mind."

By September a full chorus was vocal, led by our national veteran, Mr. Thomas Hardy, with his *Song of the Soldiers*:—

> "What of the faith and fire within us,
> Men who march away
> Ere the barn-cocks say
> Night is growing gray,
> To hazards whence no tears can win us;
> What of the faith and fire within us,
> Men who march away?"

Already, before the close of the autumn of 1914, four or five anthologies of war-poems were in the press, and the desire of the general public to be fed with patriotic and emotional verse was manifested in unmistakable ways. We had been accustomed for some time past to the issue of a multitude of little pamphlets of verse, often very carefully written, and these the critics had treated with an indulgence which would have whitened the hair of the stern reviewers of forty years ago. The youthful poets, almost a trade-union in themselves, protected one another by their sedulous generosity. It was very unusual to see anything criticised, much less "slated"; the balms of praise were poured over every rising head, and immortalities were predicted by the dozen. Yet, as a rule, the sale of these little poetic pamphlets had been small, and they had been read only by those who had a definite object in doing so.

The immediate success of the anthologies, however, proved that the war had aroused in a new public an ear for contemporary verse, an attention anxious to be stirred or soothed by the assiduous company of poets who had

been ripening their talents in a little clan. These had now an eager world ready to listen to them. The result was surprising; we may even, without exaggeration, call it unparalleled. There had never before, in the world's history, been an epoch which had tolerated and even welcomed such a flood of verse as was poured forth over Great Britain during the first three years of the war. Those years saw the publication, as I am credibly informed, of more than five hundred volumes of new and original poetry. It would be the silliest complaisance to pretend that all of this, or much of it, or any but a very little of it, has been of permanent value. Much of it was windy and superficial, striving in wild vague terms to express great agitations which were obscurely felt by the poet. There was too much of the bathos of rhetoric, especially at first; too much addressing the German as "thou fell, bloody brute," and the like, which broke no bones and took no trenches.

When once it was understood that, as a cancelled line in Tennyson's *Maud* has it,

> "The long, long canker of peace was over and done,"

the sentiments of indignation and horror made themselves felt with considerable vivacity. In this direction, however, none of the youngest poets approached Sir Owen Seaman in the vigour of their invective. Most of them seemed to be overpowered by the political situation, and few could free themselves from their inured pacific habit of speech. Even when they wrote of Belgium, the Muse seemed rather to weep than to curse. Looking back to the winter of 1914, it is almost pathetic to observe how difficult it was for our easy-going British bards to hate the Germans. There was a good deal of ineffective violence, and considerable misuse of technical terms, caused, in many cases, by a too hasty reference to newspaper reports

of gallantry under danger, in the course of which the more or less obscure verbiage of military science was picturesquely and inaccurately employed. As the slightly censorious reader looks back upon these poems of the beginning of the War, he cannot resist a certain impatience. In the first place, there is a family likeness which makes it impossible to distinguish one writer from another, and there is a tendency to a smug approval of British prejudice, and to a horrible confidence in England's power of "muddling through," which look rather ghastly in the light of subsequent struggles.

There was, however, a new spirit presently apparent, and a much healthier one. The bards became soldiers, and in crossing over to France and Flanders, each had packed his flute in his kit. They began to send home verses in which they translated into music their actual experiences and their authentic emotions. We found ourselves listening to young men who had something new, and what was better, something noble to say to us, and we returned to the national spirit which inspired the Chansons de Geste in the eleventh century. To the spirit—but not in the least to the form, since it is curious that the war-poetry of 1914–17 was, even in the most skilful hands, poetry on a small scale. The two greatest of the primal species of verse, the Epic and the Ode, were entirely neglected, except, as will later be observed, in one notable instance by Major Maurice Baring. As a rule, the poets constrained themselves to observe the discipline of a rather confined lyrical analysis in forms of the simplest character. Although particular examples showed a rare felicity of touch, and although the sincerity of the reflection in many cases hit upon very happy forms of expression, it is impossible to overlook the general monotony. There used to be a story that the Japanese Government sent a committee of its best art-critics to study the

relative merits of the modern European painters, and that they returned with the bewildered statement that they could make no report, because all European pictures were exactly alike. A student from Patagonia might conceivably argue that he could discover no difference whatever between our various poets of the war.

This would be unjust, but it is perhaps not unfair to suggest that the determined resistance to all restraint, which has marked the latest school, is not really favourable to individuality. There has been a very general, almost a universal tendency to throw off the shackles of poetic form. It has been supposed that by abandoning the normal restraints, or artificialities, of metre and rhyme, a greater directness and fidelity would be secured. Of course, if an intensified journalistic impression is all that is desired, "prose cut up into lengths" is the readiest by-way to effect. But if the poets desire—and they all do desire—to speak to ages yet unborn, they should not forget that all the experience of history goes to prove discipline not unfavourable to poetic sincerity, while, on the other hand, the absence of all restraint is fatal to it. Inspiration does not willingly attend upon flagging metre and discordant rhyme, and never in the whole choral progress from Pindar down to Swinburne has a great master been found who did not exult in the stubbornness of "dancing words and speaking strings," or who did not find his joy in reducing them to harmony. The artist who avoids all difficulties may be pleased with the rapidity of his effect, but he will have the vexation of finding his success an ephemeral one. The old advice to the poet, in preparing the rich chariot of the Muse, still holds good:—

> "Let the postillion, Nature, mount, but let
> The coachman, Art, be set."

Too many of our recent rebellious bards fancy that the

coach will drive itself, if only the post-boy sticks his heels hard into Pegasus.

It is not, however, the object of this essay to review all the poetry which was written about the war, nor even that part of it which owed its existence to the strong feeling of non-combatants at home. I propose to fix our attention on what was written by the young soldiers themselves in their beautiful gallantry, verse which comes to us hallowed by the glorious effort of battle, and in too many poignant cases by the ultimate sacrifice of life itself. The poet achieves his highest meed of contemporary glory, if

> "some brave young man's untimely fate
> In words worth dying for he celebrate,"

and when he is himself a young man striving for the same deathless honour on the same field of blood it is difficult to conceive of circumstances more poignant than those which surround his effort. On many of these poets a death of the highest nobility set the seal of eternal life. They were simple and passionate, radiant and calm, they fought for their country, and they have entered into glory. This alone might be enough to say in their praise, but star differeth from star in brightness, and from the constellation I propose to select half a dozen of the clearest luminaries. What is said in honest praise of these may be said, with due modification, of many others who miss merely the polish of their accomplishment. It is perhaps worth noticing, in passing, that most of the poets are men of university training, and that certain literary strains are common to the rank and file of them. The influence of Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne, and Rossetti is almost entirely absent. The only one of the great Victorians whom they seem to have read is Matthew Arnold, but it is impossible to help observing that the *Shropshire Lad*

of Mr. A. E. Housman was in the tunic-pocket of every one of them. Among the English poets of the past, it is mainly the so-called "metaphysical" writers in the seventeenth century whom they studied; Donne seems to have been a favourite with them all, and Vaughan and Treherne were not far behind.

The spontaneous instinct of readers has taken the name of Rupert Brooke to illustrate the poetic spirit of the great war in a superlative degree. His posthumous volume brought out in May 1915, a few weeks after his death has enjoyed a success which is greater, perhaps, than that of all the other poems of the war put together. He has become a sort of symbol, even a sort of fetish, and he is to English sentiment what Charles Péguy is to France an oriflamme of the chivalry of his country. It is curious in this connection, that neither Péguy nor Brooke had the opportunity of fighting much in the cause; they fell, as it seemed for the moment, obscurely. Rupert Brooke was a pawn in the dark and dolorous flight from Antwerp. He died in the Ægean, between Egypt and Gallipoli, having never seen a Turkish enemy. So Péguy faded out of sight on the very opening day of the battle of the Marne, yet each of these young men was immediately perceived to have embodied the gallantry of his country. The extraordinary popularity of Rupert Brooke is due to the excellence of his verse, to the tact with which it was presented to the public, but also to a vague perception of his representative nature. He was the finest specimen of a certain type produced at the universities, and then sacrificed to our national necessity.

It is needless to describe the verses of Rupert Brooke which have attained a circulation which any poet might envy. They are comprised in two slender volumes, that above mentioned, and one of 1911, published while he was still at Cambridge. He was born in 1887, and when

he died off Skyros, in circumstances of the most romantic pathos, he had not completed his twenty-eighth year. He was, unlike the majority of his contemporaries, a meticulous and reserved writer, little inclined to be pleased with his work, and cautious to avoid the snare of improvisation. Hence, though he lived to be older than did Keats or Fergusson, he left a very slender garland of verse behind him, in which there is scarcely a petal which is not of some permanent value. For instance, in the volume of 1911 we found not a few pieces which then seemed crude in taste and petulant in temper; but even these now illustrate a most interesting character of which time has rounded the angles, and we would not have otherwise what illustrates so luminously—and so divertingly—that precious object, the mind of Rupert Brooke.

Yet there is a danger that this mind and character may be misinterpreted, even by those who contemplate the poet's memory with idolatry. There is some evidence of a Rupert Brooke legend in the process of formation, which deserves to be guarded against not less jealously than the R. L. Stevenson legend of a few years ago. We know that for some people gold and lilies are not properly honoured until they are gilded and painted. Rupert Brooke was far from being either a plaster saint or a vivid public witness. He was neither a trumpet nor a torch. He lives in the memory of those who knew him as a smiling and attentive spectator, eager to watch every flourish of the pageantry of life. Existence was a wonderful harmony to Rupert Brooke, who was determined to lose no tone of it by making too much noise himself. In company he was not a great talker, but loved to listen, with sparkling deference, to people less gifted than himself if only they had experience to impart. He lived in a fascinated state, bewitched with wonder and appreciation. His very fine appearance, which seemed to glow with dormant vitality,

his beautiful manners, the quickness of his intelligence his humour, were combined under the spell of a curiou magnetism, difficult to analyse. When he entered a room he seemed to bring sunshine with him, although he wa usually rather silent, and pointedly immobile. I do no think it would be easy to recollect any utterance of hi which was very remarkable, but all he said and did adde to the harmonious, ardent, and simple effect.

There is very little of the poetry of Rupert Brook which can be definitely identified with the war. The las six months of his life, spent in conditions for which nothin in his previous existence in Cambridge or Berlin, in Grant chester or Tahiti, had in the least prepared him, wer devoted—for we must not say wasted—to breaking up th *cliché* of civilised habits. But of this harassed time ther remain to us the five immortal Sonnets, which form th crown of Rupert Brooke's verse, and his principal legac to English literature. Our record would be imperfec without the citation of one, perhaps the least hackneye of these :—

> " Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead !
> There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,
> But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.
> These laid the world away; poured out the red
> Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
> Of work and joy, and that unhoped serene,
> That men call age; and those who would have been,
> Their sons, they gave, their immortality.
>
> " Blow, bugles, blow ! They brought us, for our dearth,
> Holiness, lacked so long, and Love and Pain.
> Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,
> And paid his subjects with a royal wage;
> And Nobleness walks in our ways again;
> And we have come into our heritage."

If the fortune of his country had not disturbed his plans it is more than probable that Rupert Brooke would hav become an enlightened and enthusiastic professor. Of th

poet who detains us next it may be said that there was hardly any walk of life, except precisely this, which he could not have adorned. Julian Grenfell, who was a poet almost by accident, resembled the most enlightened of the young Italian noblemen of the Renaissance, who gave themselves with violence to a surfeit of knowledge and a riot of action. He was a humanist of the type of the fifteenth century, soldier, scholar, and man of pleasure, such as we read of in Vespasiano's famous book. Everything he did was done in the service of St. Epicurus, it was done to *darsi buon tempo*, as the Tuscans used to say. But this was only the superficial direction taken by his energy; if he was imperious in his pleasures, he was earnest in his pursuit of learning; there was a singular harmony in the exercise of the physical, intellectual, and emotional faculties at his disposal. Julian Grenfell was a master of the body and of the mind, an unrivalled boxer, a pertinacious hunter, skilled in swimming and polo, a splendid shot, a swift runner, and an unwearying student. That an athlete so accomplished should have had time left for intellectual endowments is amazing, but his natural pugnacity led him to fight lexicons as he fought the wild boar, and with as complete success.

The record of the brief and shining life of Julian Grenfell has been told in an anonymous record of family life which is destined to reverberate far beyond the discreet circle of friends to which it is provisionally addressed. It is a document of extraordinary candour, tact, and fidelity, and it is difficult to say whether humour or courage is the quality which illuminates it most. It will be referred to by future historians of our race as the most vivid record which has been preserved of the red-blooded activity of a spirited patrician family at the opening of the twentieth century. It is partly through his place at the centre of this record that, as one of the most gifted of his elder friends has said,

the name of Julian Grenfell will be linked "with all that is swift and chivalrous, lovely and courageous," but it is also through his rare and careless verses.

Julian Grenfell, who was born to excel with an enviable ease, was not a poet by determination. In a family where everything has been preserved, no verses of his that are not the merest boyish exercises are known to exist previous to the war. He was born in 1888, and he became a professional soldier in India in 1911. He was on his way home from South Africa when hostilities broke out, and he was already fighting in Flanders in October 1914. After a very brilliant campaign, in the course of which he won the D.S.O. and was twice mentioned in despatches, he was shot in the head near Ypres and died of his wounds at Boulogne on May 26th, 1915. During these months in France, by the testimony of all who saw him and of all to whom he wrote, his character received its final touch of ripeness. Among his other attainments he abruptly discovered the gift of noble gnomic verse. On receiving news of the death of Rupert Brooke, and a month before his own death, Julian Grenfell wrote the verses called "Into Battle," which contain the unforgettable stanzas:—

"The fighting man shall from the sun
Take warmth, and life from the glowing earth;
Speed with the light-foot winds to run,
And with the trees to newer birth. . . .

"The woodland trees that stand together,
They stand to him each one a friend;
They gently speak in the windy weather;
They guide to valley and ridge's end.

"The kestrel hovering by day,
And the little owls that call by night,
Bid him be swift and keen as they,
As keen of ear, as swift of sight.

"The blackbird sings to him 'Brother, brother,
If this be the last song you shall sing,
Sing well, for you may not sing another,
Brother, sing.'"

The whole of this poem is memorable, down to its final prophetic quatrain :—

> "The thundering line of battle stands,
> And in the air Death moans and sings;
> But Day shall clasp him with strong hands,
> And Night shall fold him in soft wings."

"Could any other man in the British Army have knocked out a heavy-weight champion one week and written that poem the next?" a brother officer asked. "Into Battle" remains, and will probably continue to remain, the clearest lyrical expression of the fighting spirit of England in which the war has found words. It is a poem for soldiers, and it gives noble form to their most splendid aspirations. Julian Grenfell wrote, as he boxed and rode, as he fought in the mud of Flanders, as the ideal sporting Englishman of our old, heroic type.

The ancient mystery of verse is so deeply based on tradition that it is not surprising that all the strange contrivances of twentieth-century warfare have been found too crabbed for our poets to use. When great Marlborough, as Addison puts it, "examin'd all the dreadful scenes of war" at Blenheim, he was really in closer touch with Marathon than with the tanks and gas of Ypres. But there is one military implement so beautiful in itself, and so magical in the nature of its service, that it is bound to conquer a place in poetry. The air-machine, to quote *The Campaign* once more, "rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm." But the poets are still shy of it. In French it has, as yet, inspired but one good poem, the "Plus haut toujours!" of Jean Allard-Méeus, a hymn of real aerial majesty. In English Major Maurice Baring's ode "In Memoriam: A.H." is equally unique, and, in its complete diversity from Allard-Méeus' rhapsody, suggests that the aeroplane has a wide field before it in the

realms of imaginative writing. Major Baring's subject is the death of Auberon Herbert, Lord Lucas, who was killed on November 3rd, 1916. This distinguished young statesman and soldier had just been promoted, after a career of prolonged gallantry in the air, and would have flown no more, if he had returned in safety to our front on that fatal day.

Major Baring has long been known as an excellent composer of sonnets and other short pieces. But " In Memoriam : A.H." lifts him to a position among our living poets to which he had hardly a pretension. In a long irregular threnody or funeral ode, the great technical difficulty is to support lyrical emotion throughout. No form of verse is more liable to lapses of dignity, to dull and flagging passages. Even Dryden in *Anne Killigrew*, even Coleridge in the *Departing Year*, have not been able to avoid those languors. Many poets attempt to escape them by a use of swollen and pompous language. I will not say that Major Baring has been universally successful, where the success of the great masters is only relative, but he has produced a poem of great beauty and originality, which interprets an emotion and illustrates an incident the poignancy of which could scarcely be exaggerated. I have no hesitation in asserting that " A. H." is one of the few durable contributions to the literature of the present war.

It is difficult to quote effectively from a poem which is constructed with great care on a complicated plan, but a fragment of Major Baring's elegy may lead readers to the original :—

" God, Who had made you valiant, strong and swift
And maimed you with a bullet long ago,
And cleft your riotous ardour with a rift,
And checked your youth's tumultuous overflow,
Gave back your youth to you,
And packed in moments rare and few

Achievements manifold
And happiness untold,
And bade you spring to Death as to a bride,
In manhood's ripeness, power and pride,
And on your sandals the strong wings of youth."

There is no rhetoric here, no empty piling up of fine words; it is a closely followed study in poetical biography.

The water has its marvels like the air, but they also have hardly yet secured the attention of the poets. In *A Naval Motley*, by Lieut. N. M. F. Corbett, published in June 1916, we encounter the submarine :—

"Not yours to know delight
In the keen hard-fought fight,
The shock of battle and the battle's thunder;
But suddenly to feel
Deep, deep beneath the keel
The vital blow that rives the ship asunder!"

A section of the new war-poetry which is particularly pathetic is that which is inspired by the nostalgia of home, by the longing in the midst of the guns and the dust and the lice for the silent woodlands and cool waters of England. When this is combined with the sense of extreme youth, and of a certain brave and beautiful innocence, the poignancy of it is almost more than can be borne. The judgment is hampered, and one doubts whether one's critical feeling can be trusted. This particular species of emotion is awakened by no volume more than by the slender *Worple Flit* of E. Wyndham Tennant, who died on the Somme in September 1916. He was only nineteen when he fell, at an age when, on the one hand, more precocious verse than his has been written, and when yet, on the other, some of the greatest poets had not achieved a mastery of words equal to that already possessed by this young Wykehamist. The voice is faltering, and there is a want of sureness in the touch; the metrical hammer does not

always tap the centre of the nail's head. But what pathos in the sentiment, what tenderness in the devotion to beauty! Tennant had, we may suppose, read Flecker before he wrote "How shall I tell you of the roads that stretch away?"; or was it merely the family likeness in the generation? But I know not what but his own genius can have inspired the "Home Thoughts in Laventie," a poem about a little garden left unravished among the rubble of the wrecked village, a poem which ends thus:—

> "I saw green banks of daffodil,
>   Slim poplars in the breeze,
> Great tan-brown hares in gusty March
>   A-courting on the leas.
> And meadows, with their glittering streams—
>   and silver-scurrying dace—
> Home, what a perfect place."

Among these boy-poets, so cruelly and prematurely snatched from the paternal earth, Tennant suggests to us the possibility that a talent of very high order was quenched by death, because in few of them do we find so much evidence of that "perception and awe of Beauty" which Plotinus held to be the upward path to God.

In June 1917 there was published a slender volume which is in several ways the most puzzling and the most interesting of all that lie upon my table to-day. This is the *Ardours and Endurances* of Lieut. Robert Nichols. I knew nothing of the author save what I learned from his writings, that he is very young, that he went out from Oxford early in the war, that he was fighting in Flanders before the end of 1914, that he was wounded, perhaps at Loos, in 1915, and that he was long in hospital. I felt the hope, which later information has confirmed, that he was still alive and on the road to recovery. Before *Ardours and*

Endurances reached me, I had met with *Invocation*, a smaller volume published by Lieut. Nichols in December 1915. There has rarely been a more radical change in the character of an artist than is displayed by a comparison of these two collections. *Invocation*, in which the war takes a small and unconvincing place, is creditable, though rather uncertain, in workmanship, and displays a tendency towards experiment in rich fancy and vague ornament. In *Ardours and Endurances* the same accents are scarcely to be detected; the pleasant boy has grown into a war-worn man; while the mastery over the material of poetic art has become so remarkable as to make the epithet "promising" otiose. There is no "promise" here; there is high performance.

Alone among the poets before me, Lieut. Nichols has set down a reasoned sequence of war impressions. The opening Third of his book, and by far its most interesting section, consists of a cycle of pieces in which the personal experience of fighting is minutely reported, stage by stage. We have "The Summons," the reluctant but unhesitating answer to the call in England, the break-up of plans; then the farewell to home, "the place of comfort." "The Approach," in three successive lyrics, describes the arrival at the Front. "Battle," in eleven sections, reproduces the mental and physical phenomena of the attack. "The Dead," in four instalments, tells the tale of grief. "The Aftermath," with extraordinary skill, records in eight stages the gradual recovery of nerve-power after the shattering emotions of the fight. The first section of "Battle," as being shorter than the rest, may be quoted in full as an example of Lieut. Nichols's method:—

"It is mid-day: the deep trench glares—
A buzz and blaze of flies—
The hot wind puffs the giddy airs,
The great sun rakes the skies,

"No sound in all the stagnant trench
Where forty standing men
Endure the sweat and grit and stench,
Like cattle in a pen.

"Sometimes a sniper's bullet whirs
Or twangs the whining wire;
Sometimes a soldier sighs and stirs
As in hell's forging fire.

"From out a high cool cloud descends
An aeroplane's far moan;
The sun strikes down, the thin cloud rends,
The black speck travels on.

"And sweating, dizzied, isolate
In the hot trench beneath,
We bide the next shrewd move of fate
Be it of life or death."

This is painfully vivid, but it is far exceeded in poignancy by what follows. Indeed it would be difficult to find in all literature, from the wail of David over Jonathan downward, such an expression of the hopeless longing for an irrecoverable presence as informs the broken melodies, the stanzas which are like sobs, of the fifth section of *Ardours and Endurances*:—

"In a far field, away from England, lies
A Boy I friended with a care like love;
All day the wide earth aches, the cold wind cries,
The melancholy clouds drive on above.

"There, separate from him by a little span,
Two eagle cousins, generous, reckless, free,
Two Grenfells, lie, and my Boy is made man,
One with these elder knights of chivalry."

It is difficult to qualify, it seems almost indelicate to intrude upon, such passionate grief. These poems form a revelation of the agony of a spirit of superabundant refinement and native sensuousness suddenly stunned, and as it were momentarily petrified, by horrible spiritual anguish. If the strain were not relieved by the final numbers of "Aftermath," where the pain of the soul is abated, and where the poet, scarred and shattered, but "free at last,

snaps the chain of despair, these poems would be positively intolerable.

In the closeness of his analysis and in the accurate heaping up of exact and pregnant observations, Lieut. Nichols comes closer than any other of these English poets to the best of the French paladins, of whom I wrote in *Three French Moralists*. One peculiarity which he shares with them is his seriousness: there is no trace in him of the English cheerfulness and levity. Most of our war-writers are incorrigible Mark Tapleys. But Lieut. Nichols, even when he uses colloquial phrases—and he introduces them with great effect—never smiles. He is most unlike the French, on the other hand, in his general attitude towards the war. He has no military enthusiasm, no aspiration after *gloire*. Indeed, the most curious feature of his poetry is that its range is concentrated on the few yards about the trench in which he stands. He seems to have no national view of the purpose of the war, no enthusiasm for the cause, no anger against the enemy. There is but a single mention of the Germans from beginning to end; the poet does not seem to know of their existence. His experiences, his agonies, his despair, are what a purely natural phenomenon, such as the eruption of a volcano or the chaos of an earthquake, might cause. We might read his poems over and over again without forming the slightest idea of what all the distress was about, or who was guilty, or what was being defended. This is a mark of great artistic sincerity; but it also points to a certain moral narrowness. Lieut. Robert Nichols' "endurances" are magnificently described, but we are left in the dark regarding his "ardours." We are sure of one thing, however, that none of us may guess what such a talent, in one still so young, may have in store for us; and we may hope for broader views expressed in no less burning accents.

There could hardly be a more vivid contrast than exists

between the melancholy passion of Lieut. Nichols and the fantastic high spirits of Captain Robert Graves. He again is evidently a very young man, who was but yester-year a jolly boy at the Charterhouse. He has always meant to be a poet; he is not one of those who have been driven into verse by the strenuous emotion of the war. In some diverting prefatory lines to *Over the Brazier* he gives us a picture of the nursery-scene when a bright green-covered book bewitched him by its "metre twisting like a chain of daisies, with great big splendid words." He has still a wholesome hunger for splendid words; he has kept more deliberately than most of his compeers a poetical vocation steadily before him. He has his moments of dejection when the first battle faces him :—

"Here's an end to my art!
I must die and I know it,
With battle-murder at my heart—
Sad death for a poet!

"Oh, my songs never sung,
And my plays to darkness blown!
I am still so young, so young,
And life was my own."

But this mood soon passes, and is merged in the humoristic and fantastic elation characteristic of this buoyant writer, whose whim it is to meet the tragedy not mournfully but boisterously. Where by most of the soldier-bards the subjective manner is a little over-done, it is impossible not to welcome so objective a writer as Captain Graves, from whose observations of the battle of La Bassée I quote an episode :—

THE DEAD FOX HUNTER

"We found the little captain at the head;
His men lay well aligned.
We touched his hand, stone-cold, and he was dead,
And they, all dead behind,
Had never reached their goal, but they died well;
They charged in line, and in the same line fell.

"The well-known rosy colours of his face
Were almost lost in grey.
We saw that, dying and in hopeless case,
For others' sake that day
He'd smothered all rebellious groans: in death
His fingers were tight clenched between his teeth.

"For those who live uprightly and die true
Heaven has no bars or locks,
And serves all taste . . . Or what's for him to do
Up there, but hunt the fox?
Angelic choirs? No, Justice must provide
For one who rode straight and at hunting died.

"So if Heaven had no Hunt before he came,
Why, it must find one now:
If any shirk and doubt they know the game,
There's one to teach them how:
And the whole host of Seraphim complete
Must jog in scarlet to his opening Meet."

I have a notion that this is a gallant poem which Englishmen will not allow to be forgotten. The great quality of Captain Graves' verse at present is its elated vivacity, which neither fire, nor pain, nor grief can long subdue. Acutely sensitive to all these depressing elements, his animal spirits lift him like an aeroplane, and he is above us in a moment, soaring through clouds of nonsense under a sky of unruffled gaiety. In our old literature, of which he is plainly a student, he has found a neglected author who is wholly to his taste. This is Skelton, Henry VIII.'s Rabelaisian laureate. Captain Graves imitates, with a great deal of bravado, those breathless absurdities, *The Tunning of Elinore Rummyng* and *Colin Clout.* He likes rough metre, bad rhymes and squalid images: we suspect him of an inclination to be rude to his immediate predecessors. But his extreme modernness—"Life is a *cliché*—I would find a gesture of my own"—is, in the case of so lively a songster, an evidence of vitality. He promises a new volume, to be called *Fairies and Fusiliers*, and it will be looked forward to with anticipation.

All these poets seem to be drawn into relation to one another. Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon are both Fusiliers, and they publish a *στιχομυθία* "on Nonsense," just as Cowley and Crashaw did "on Hope" two centuries and a half ago. Lieut. Sassoon's own volume is later than those which we have hitherto examined, and bears a somewhat different character. The gallantry of 1915 and the optimism of 1916 have passed away, and in Lieut. Sassoon's poems their place is taken by a sense of intolerable weariness and impatience: "How long, O Lord, how long?" The name-piece of the volume, and perhaps its first in execution, is a monologue by an ignorant and shrewd old huntsman, who looks back over his life with philosophy and regret. Like Captain Graves, he is haunted with the idea that there must be fox-hounds in Heaven. All Lieut. Sassoon's poems about horses and hunting and country life generally betray his tastes and habits. This particular poem hardly touches on the war, but those which follow are absorbed by the ugliness, lassitude, and horror of fighting. Lieut. Sassoon's verse has not yet secured the quality of perfection; he is not sufficiently alive to the importance of always hitting upon the best and only word. He is essentially a satirist, and sometimes a very bold one, as in "The Hero," where the death of a soldier is announced home in "gallant lies," so that his mother brags to her neighbours of the courage of her dead son. At the close of all this pious make-believe, the Colonel

> "thought how 'Jack,' cold-footed, useless swine,
> Had panicked down the trench that night the mine
> Went up at Wicked Corner; how he'd tried
> To get sent home; and how, at last, he died,
> Blown to small bits";

or, again, as in "Blighters," where the sentimentality of London is contrasted with the reality in Flanders:

"The House is crammed: tier beyond tier they grin
And cackle at the Show, while prancing ranks
Of harlots shrill the chorus, drunk with din,
'We're sure the Kaiser loves the dear old Tanks!'

"I'd like to see a Tank come down the stalls,
Lurching to rag-time tunes, or 'Home, sweet Home!'—
And there'd be no more jokes in Music-halls
To mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume."

It is this note of bitter anger, miles away from the serenity of Rupert Brooke, the lion-heart of Julian Grenfell, the mournful passion of Robert Nichols, which differentiates Lieut. Sassoon from his fellows. They accept the war, with gallantry or with resignation; he detests it with wrathful impatience. He has much to learn as an artist, for his diction is often hard, and he does not always remember that Horace, "when he writ on vulgar subjects, yet writ not vulgarly." But he has force, sincerity, and a line of his own in thought and fancy. A considerable section of his poetry is occupied with studies of men he has observed at the Front, a subaltern, a private of the Lancashires, conscripts, the dross of a battle-field, the one-legged man ("Thank God, they had to amputate!"), the sniper who goes crazy—savage, disconcerting silhouettes drawn roughly against a lurid background.

The bitterness of Lieut. Sassoon is not cynical, it is the rage of disenchantment, the violence of a young man eager to pursue other aims, who, finding the age out of joint, resents being called upon to help to mend it. His temper is not altogether to be applauded, for such sentiments must tend to relax the effort of the struggle, yet they can hardly be reproved when conducted with so much honesty and courage. Lieut. Sassoon, who, as we learn, has twice been severely wounded and has been in the very furnace of the fighting, has reflected, more perhaps than his fellow-singers, about the causes and conditions of the war. He may not always have thought correctly, nor have recorded

his impressions with proper circumspection, but his honesty must be respectfully acknowledged.

I have now called attention to those soldier-writers of verse who, in my judgment, expressed themselves with most originality during the war. There is a temptation to continue the inquiry, and to expatiate on others of only less merit and promise. Much could be said of Charles Hamilton Sorley, who gave evidence of precocious literary talent, though less, I think, in verse, since the unmistakable singing faculty is absent in *Marlborough* (Cambridge University Press, 1916), than in prose, a form in which he already excelled. Sorley must have shown military gifts as well as a fine courage, for when he was killed in action in October 1915, although he was but twenty years of age, he had been promoted captain. In the universal sorrow, few figures awaken more regret than his. Something, too, had I space, should be said about the minstrels who have been less concerned with the delicacies of workmanship than with stirring the pulses of their auditors. In this kind of lyric "A Leaping Wind from England" will long keep fresh the name of W. N. Hodgson, who was killed in the battle of the Somme. His verses were collected in November 1916. The strange, rough drum-taps of Mr. Henry Lawson, published in Sydney at the close of 1915, and those of Mr. Lawrence Rentoul, testify to Australian enthusiasm. Most of the soldier-poets were quite youthful; an exception was R. E. Vernède, whose *War Poems* (W. Heinemann, 1917) show the vigour of moral experience. He was killed in the attack on Harrincourt, in April 1917, having nearly closed his forty-second year. To pursue the list would only be to make my omissions more invidious.

There can be no healthy criticism where the principle of selection is neglected, and I regret that patriotism or indulgence has tempted so many of those who have spoken of

the war-poets of the day to plaster them with indiscriminate praise. I have here mentioned a few, in whose honour even a little excess of laudation may not be out of place. But these are the exceptions, in a mass of standardised poetry made to pattern, loosely versified, respectable in sentiment, uniformly meditative, and entirely without individual character. The reviewers who applaud all these ephemeral efforts with a like acclaim, and who say that there are hundreds of poets now writing who equal if they do not excel the great masters of the past, talk nonsense; they talk nonsense, and they know it. They lavish their flatteries in order to widen the circle of their audience. They are like the prophets of Samaria, who declared good unto the King of Israel with one mouth; and we need a Micaiah to clear the scene of all such flatulent Zedekiahs. It is not true that the poets of the youngest generation are a myriad Shelleys and Burnses and Bérangers rolled into one. But it is true that they carry on the great tradition of poetry with enthusiasm, and a few of them with high accomplishment.

1917.

THE FUTURE OF ENGLISH POETRY

THE FUTURE OF ENGLISH POETRY[1]

> "J'ai vu le cheval rose ouvrir ses ailes d'or,
> Et, flairant le laurier que je tenais encor,
> Verdoyant à jamais, hier comme aujourd'hui,
> Se cabrer vers le Jour et ruer vers la Nuit."
>
> HENRI DE RÉGNIER.

IN venturing this afternoon to address an audience accustomed to listen to those whose positive authority is universally recognised, and in taking for my theme a subject not, like theirs, distinct in its definitions or consecrated by tradition and history, I am aware that I perform what you may, if you choose, call an act of blameworthy audacity. My subject is chimerical, vague, and founded on conjectures which you may well believe yourselves at least as well fitted as I am to propound. Nevertheless, and in no rash or paradoxical spirit, I invite you to join with me in some reflections on what is the probable course of English poetry during, let us say, the next hundred years. If I happen to be right, I hope some of the youngest persons present will say, when I am long turned to dust, what an illuminating prophet I was. If I happen to be wrong, why, no one will remember anything at all about the matter. In any case we may possibly be rewarded this afternoon by some agreeable hopes and by the contemplation of some pleasant analogies.

Our title takes for granted that English poetry will

[1] Address delivered before the English Association, May 30, 1913.

continue, with whatever fluctuations, to be a living and abiding thing. This I must suppose that you all accede to, and that you do not look upon poetry as an art which is finished, or the harvest of classic verse as one which is fully reaped and garnered. That has been believed at one time and another, in various parts of the globe. I will mention one instance in the history of our own time: a quarter of a century ago, the practice of writing verse was deliberately abandoned in the literatures of the three Scandinavian countries, but particularly in that of Norway, where no poetry, in our sense, was written from about 1873 to 1885. It almost died out here in England in the middle of the fifteenth century; it ran very low in France at the end of the Middle Ages. But all these instances, whether ancient or modern, of the attempt to prove prose a sufficing medium for all expression of human thought have hitherto failed, and it is now almost certain that they will more and more languidly be revived, and with less and less conviction.

It was at one of the deadliest moments in the life of the art in England that George Gascoigne remarked, in his *Epistle to the Reverend Divine* (1574) that "It seemeth unto me that in all ages Poetry hath been not only permitted, but also it hath been thought a right good thing." Poetry has occupied the purest and the fieriest minds in all ages, and you will remember that Plato, who excluded the poets from his philosophical Utopia, was nevertheless an exquisite writer of lyrical verse himself. So, to come down to our own day, Ibsen, who drove poetry out of the living language of his country, had been one of the most skilful of prosodical proficients. Such instances may allay our alarm. There cannot be any lasting force in arguments which remind us of the pious confessions of a redeemed burglar. It needs more than the zeal of a turncoat to drive Apollo out of Parnassus.

There will, therefore, we may be sure, continue to be English poetry written and printed. Can we form any idea of the probable character of it? There exists, in private hands, a picture by that ingenious water-colour painter of the late eighteenth century, William Gilpin. It is very fantastic, and means what you like, but it represents Pegasus, the horse of the Muses, careering in air on the vast white arc of his wings, against a sky so dark that it must symbolise the obscure discourse of those who write in prose. You are left quite doubtful whether he will strike the rocky terrace in the foreground with his slender, silver hooves, or will swoop down into the valley below, or will soar to heaven and out of sight. You are left by the painter in a pleasant uncertainty, but Hippocrene may break out anywhere, and of the vivacious courser himself all that we can be sure of is that we are certain to see him alighting before us when we least expect him.

We may put our trust in the persistence of Pegasus through his apparently aimless gyrations, and in the elasticity of the poetical spirit, and yet acknowledge that there are difficulties in the way of believing that verse will continue to be written in the English language for a quite indefinite period. Perhaps we may as well face one or two of these difficulties at once. The principal danger, then, to the future of poetry seems to me to rest in the necessity of freshness of expression. Every school of verse is a rising and a breaking wave. It rises, because its leaders have become capable of new forms of attractive expression; its crest is some writer, or several writers, of genius, who combine skill and fire and luck at a moment of extreme opportuneness; and then the wave breaks, because later writers cannot support the ecstasy, and merely repeat formulas which have lost their attractiveness. Shirley would have been a portent, if he had flourished in 1595 and had written then as he did in 1645. Erasmus

Darwin would be one of the miracles of prosody if *The Loves of the Plants* could be dated 1689 instead of 1789. There must always be this fluctuation, this rise and fall in value, and what starts each new wave mounting out of the trough of the last is the instinctive demand for freshness of expression. *Cantate Domino* is the cry of youth, sing a *new* song unto the Lord.

But with the superabundant circulation of language year after year, week after week, by a myriad careful scribes, the possibilities of freshness grow rarer and rarer. The obvious, simple, poignant things seem to have all been said. It is not merely that the actual poems, like Gray's *Elegy*, and much of *Hamlet*, and some of Burns's songs, have been manipulated so often, and put to such pedestrian uses, that they are like rubbed coins, and begin to lose the very features of Apollo and the script of the Muses, but that the road seems closed to future bards who wish to speak with simplicity of similar straightforward things. In several of the literatures of modern Europe—those which began late, or struggled long against great disadvantages—it is still possible to produce pleasure by poems which describe primitive emotions in perfectly limpid language. But with us in England, I confess that it seems to me certain that whatever we retain, we can never any more have patience to listen to a new shepherd piping under the hawthorn-tree. Each generation is likely to be more acutely preoccupied than the last with the desire for novelty of expression. Accordingly, the sense of originality, which is so fervently demanded from every new school of writers, will force the poets of the future to sweep away all recognised impressions. The consequence must be, I think—I confess so far as language is concerned that I see no escape from this—that the natural uses of English and the obvious forms of our speech will be driven from our national poetry, as they are even now so generally being driven.

No doubt, in this condition, the originality of those who do contrive to write strongly and clearly will be more vigorously evident than ever. The poets will have to gird up their loins and take their sword in their hands. That wise man of the eighteenth century, to whom we never apply without some illuminating response, recommends that "Qui saura penser de lui-même et former de nobles idées, qu'il prenne, s'il peut, la manière et le tour élevé des maîtres." These are words which should inspire every new aspirant to the laurel. "S'il peut"; you see that Vauvenargues puts it so, because he does not wish that we should think that such victories as these are easy, or that any one else can help us to produce them. They are not easy, and they will be made more and more hard by the rubbed-out, conventionalised coinage of our language.

In this matter I think it probable that the little peoples and the provinces which cultivate a national speech, will long find a great facility in expressing themselves in verse. I observe that it has recently been stated that Wales, which has always teemed with vernacular poets, has never possessed so many as she does at this time. I am debarred by what Keats called "giant ignorance" from expressing an opinion on the subject, but I presume that in Welsh the resources of language are far from being so seriously exhausted as we have seen that they are in our own complicated sphere, where the cultivation of all the higher forms of poetic diction through five centuries has made simple expression extremely difficult. I am therefore ready to believe that in Welsh, as in Gaelic and in Erse, the poets have still wide fields of lyric, epic, and dramatic art untilled. We have seen, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Provençal poets capable of producing simple and thrilling numbers which are out of the reach of their sophisticated brethren who employ the worn locutions of the French language.

In new generations there is likely, we may be sure, to occur less description of plain material objects, because the aspect of these has already received every obvious tribute. So also there can hardly fail to be less precise enumeration of the primitive natural emotions, because this also has been done already, and repeated to satiety. It will not any longer satisfy to write

"The rose is red, the violet blue,
And both are sweet, and so are you."

Reflections of this order were once felt to be exquisite, and they were so still as lately as when Blake and Wordsworth were young. But it is quite impossible that we should ever go back to them. Future poets will seek to analyse the redness of the rose, and will scout, as a fallacious observation, the statement that the violet is blue. All schemes of art become mechanical and insipid, and even their *naïvetés* lose their savour. Verse of excellent quality, in this primitive manner, can now be written to order by any smart little boy in a Grammar-school.

We have agreed, however, to believe that poetry, as an art, in one shape or another, will escape from the bankruptcy of language, and that Pegasus, with whatever strange and unexpected gambollings, will continue to accompany us. But of one thing we may be quite sure, that it will only be at the cost of much that we at present admire and enjoy that the continuity of the art of verse will be preserved. If I could suddenly present to you some characteristic passages of the best English poetry of 1963, I doubt extremely whether I should be able to persuade you of their merit. I am not sure that you would understand what the poet intended to convey, any more than the Earl of Surrey would have understood the satires of Donne, or Coleridge have enjoyed the odes of George Meredith. Young minds invariably display their vitality by attacking

the accepted forms of expression, and then they look about for novelties, which they cultivate with what seems to their elders to be extravagance. Before we attempt to form an idea, however shadowy, of what poetry will be in the future, we must disabuse ourselves of the delusion that it will be a repetition of what is now produced and accepted. Nor can we hope by any exercise of philosophy to do away with the embarrassing and painful, but after all perhaps healthful antagonism between those who look forward and those who live in the past. The earnestness expended on new work will always render young men incapable of doing justice to what is a very little older than themselves; and the piety with which the elderly regard what gave them full satisfaction in their days of emotional freshness will always make it difficult for them to be just to what seems built on the ruins of what they loved.

If there is any feature which we can scarcely be wrong in detecting in our vision of the poetry of the future it is an elaboration which must follow on the need for novelty of which I have spoken. I expect to find the modern poet accepting more or less consciously an ever-increasing symbolic subtlety of expression. If we could read his verses, which are still unwritten, I feel sure that we should consider them obscure. That is to say, we should find that in his anxiety not to repeat what had been said before him, and in his horror of the trite and the superficial, he will achieve effect and attach interest *obscuris vera involvens*—wrapping the truth in darkness. The "darkness" will be relative, as his own contemporaries, being more instructed and sophisticated than we are, will find those things transparent, or at least translucent, which remain opaque enough to us. And, of course, as epithets and adjectives that seem fresh to us will smell of the inkhorn to him, he will have to exert his ingenuity to find parallel expres-

sions which would startle us by their oddity if we met with them now.

A danger, therefore, which the poets of the future will need all their ingenuity to avoid, will be the cultivation of a patent artificiality, a forcing of the note until it ceases to rouse an echo in the human heart. There will be a determination to sweep away all previously recognised impressions. Affectation, that is to say the obtaining of an effect by illegitimate means, is an offence against the Muses which they never fail to avenge by oblivion or by a curtailed and impeded circulation. We may instructively examine the history of literature with special attention to this fault, and we find it in all cases to have been fatal. It was fatal to the poetry of Alexandria, which closed, as you know, in an obscurity to which the title of Lycophrontic darkness has been given from the name of its most extravagant exponent. It was fatal to several highly-gifted writers of the close of the Elizabethan period, who endeavoured to give freshness to an outworn scheme of poetic ornament; I need only remind you of the impenetrable cloud or fog, by Cyril Tourneur, called *The Transform'd Metamorphosis*, and of the cryptic rhymed dramas of Lord Brooke. It has not been fatal, I hope, but I think desperately perilous to a beautiful talent of our own age, the amiable Stéphane Mallarmé. Nothing, I feel, is more dangerous to the health of poetry than the praise given by a group of irresponsible disciples to verse which transfers commonplace thought to an exaggerated, violent, and involved scheme of diction, and I confess that I should regard the future of poetry in this country with much more apprehension than I do, if I believed that the purely learned poet, the prosodical pedant, was destined to become paramount amongst us. That would, indeed, threaten the permanence of the art; and it is for this reason that I look with a certain measure of alarm on the excess of

verbiage about versification which attends not merely criticism—for that matters little—but the actual production and creation. I am confident, however, that the common sense of readers will always bring about a reaction in favour of sanity and lucidity.

One great objection to the introduction of a tortured and affected style into verse-writing is the sacrifice which has to be made of that dignity and sweetness, that suave elevation, which marks all successful masterpieces. Perhaps as difficult a quality to attain as any which the poetry of the future will be called upon to study is stateliness, what the French call "la vraie hauteur." This elevation of style, this dignity, is foreign to democracies, and it is hard to sustain it in the rude air of modern life. It easily degenerates, as Europe saw it degenerate for a century and a half, into pomposity relieved by flatness. It is apt to become a mere sonorous rhetoric, a cultivation of empty fine phrases. If we examine the serious poetry of the end of the seventeenth and the greater part of the eighteenth century—especially in the other countries of Europe, for England was never without some dew on the threshing-floor—if we examine it in France, for instance, between Racine and André Chenier, we are obliged to recognise that it was very rarely both genuine and appropriate. The Romantic Revival, which we are beginning ungratefully to decry, did at least restore to poetry the sense of a genuine stateliness of expression, which once more gave it the requisite dignity, and made it a vehicle for the vital and the noble sentiments of humanity.

Let us now turn, in our conjectural survey, from the form to the subjects with which the poetry of the future is likely to be engaged. Here we are confronted with the fact that, if we examine the whole of history, we see that the domain of verse has been persistently narrowed by the incursions of a more and more powerful and wide

embracing prose. At the dawn of civilisation poetry had it all its own way. If instruction was desired upon any sphere of human knowledge or energy, the bard produced it in a prosodical shape, combining with the dignity of form the aid which the memory borrowed from a pattern or a song. Thus you conceive of a Hesiod before you think of a Homer, and the earliest poetry was probably of a purely didactic kind. As time went on, prose, with its exact pedestrian method, took over more and more completely the whole province of information, but it was not until the nineteenth century that the last strongholds of the poetry of instruction were stormed. I will, if you please, bring this home to you by an example which may surprise you.

The subject which I have taken the liberty of discussing with you this afternoon has not often occupied the serious attention of critics. But it was attempted, by no less a person than Wordsworth, more than a hundred years ago. I make no excuse for repeating to you the remarkable passage in which he expressed his convictions in the famous Preface of 1800:—

"If the labours of men of science,—Wordsworth said,—should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the Man of Science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself. The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective

sciences, thus familiarised to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the Being thus produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man."

It is plain, then, that, writing in the year 1800, Wordsworth believed that a kind of modified and sublimated didactic poetry would come into vogue in the course of the nineteenth century. He stood on the threshold of a new age, and he cast his vatic gaze across it much in the same spirit as we are trying to do to-day. But if any warning were needed to assure us of the vanity of prophesying, it would surely be the error of one so sublimely gifted and so enriched with the spoils of meditation. The belief of Wordsworth was that the poetry of the future would deal, in some vaguely inspired fashion, with the discoveries of science. But when we look back over the field of 113 years, how much do we find our national poetry enriched with ore from the mines of mineralogy or botany or chemistry? It is difficult to see that there has been so much as an effort made to develop poetry in this or in any similar direction. Perhaps the nearest approach to what Wordsworth conceived as probable was attempted by Tennyson, particularly in those parts of *In Memoriam* where he dragged in analogies to geological discoveries and the biological theories of his time. Well, these are just those parts of Tennyson which are now most universally repudiated as lifeless and jejune.

Wordsworth did not confine himself to predicting a revival of didactic poetry, the poetry of information, such as, in a very crude form, had prevailed all over Europe in his own childhood, but he conceived a wide social activity for writers of verse. He foresaw that the Poet would "bind together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of

human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time." I suppose that in composing those huge works, so full of scattered beauties, but in their entirety so dry and solid, *The Excursion* and *The Prelude*, he was consciously attempting to inaugurate this scheme of a wide and all-embracing social poetry. Nor do I suppose that efforts of this kind will ever cease to be made. We have seen a gifted writer in whom the memory is perhaps even more surprisingly developed than the imagination, employ the stores of his experience to enrich a social poetry the elements of which, prima facie, should be deeply attractive to us all. But I do not know that the experiments of Mr. Rudyard Kipling, brilliant as they are, are calculated to encourage the poets of the future to pursue their lyric celebration of machinery and sociology and the mysteries of natural religion. Already is it not that portion of his work which we approach with most languor, in spite of its originality and its outlook upon "the vast empire of human society"? And lesser poets than he who seek for popularity by such violent means are not, I think, rewarded by the distinguished loyalty of the best readers. We are startled by their novelty, and we admire them for the moment; but when, a few years later, we return to them, we are apt to observe with distress how

> "their lean and flashy songs
> Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw."

If, therefore, I venture upon a prophecy, where all the greater prophets, my predecessors, have failed, it is to suggest that the energy of future poets will not be largely exercised on themes of this intrepid social character, but that as civilisation more and more tightly lays hold upon literature, and excludes the purest form of it from one province after another, poetry will, in its own defence, cultivate more and more what Hazlitt calls "a mere

effusion of natural sensibility." Hazlitt used the phrase in derision, but we may accept it seriously, and not shrink from adopting it. In most public remarks about current and coming literature in the abstract, I marvel at the confidence with which it is taken for granted that the sphere of interest occupied by writers of the imagination is sure to grow wider and wider. It is expected to embrace the world, to take part in a universal scheme of pacification, to immortalise imperial events, to be as public as possible. But surely it is more and more clearly proved that prose is the suitable medium for such grandiose themes as these. Within the last year our minds have been galvanised into collective sympathy by two great sensations of catastrophe, each case wearing the most thrilling form that tragedy can take in the revolt of nature against the feverish advances of mankind. I suppose we may consider the destruction of the *Titanic* and the loss of Captain Scott's expedition as two absolutely typical examples of what is thought by journalists to be fitting material for poetry. Yet by common consent, these tragic occurrences did not awaken our numerous poets to any really remarkable effort, lyrical or elegiac. No ode or threnody could equal in vibrating passion Captain Scott's last testament. These are matters in which the fullness of a wholly sincere statement in prose does not require, does not even admit, the introduction of the symbol. The impact of the sentiments of horror and pity is too sudden and forcible.

My own view is that, whether to its advantage or not, the poetry of the future is likely to be very much occupied with subjects, and with those alone, which cannot be expressed in the prose of the best-edited newspaper. In fact, if I were to say what it is which I think coming poets will have more and more to be on their guard against, I should define it as a too rigid determination never to examine subjects which are of collective interest to the

race at large. I dread lest the intense cultivation of the Ego, in minutest analysis and microscopical observation of one's self, should become the sole preoccupation of the future poet. I will not tell you that I dread lest this should be one of his principal preoccupations, for that would be to give way to a cheery piece of mid-Victorian hypocrisy which would be unworthy of you and of me alike. The time is past when intelligent persons ought to warn writers of the imagination not to cultivate self-analysis, since it is the only safeguard against the follies of an unbridled romanticism. But although the ivory tower offers a most valuable retreat, and although the poets may be strongly recommended to prolong their *villeggiatura* there, it should not be the year-long habitation of any healthy intelligence.

I do not question that the closing up of the poetic field, the depending more and more completely for artistic effect upon an "effusion of natural sensibility," will isolate the poet from his fellows. He will be tempted, in the pursuit of the symbol which illustrates his emotion, to draw farther and farther away from contact with the world. He will wrap his singing-robes not over his limbs only, but over his face, and treat his readers with exemplary disdain. We must be prepared, or our successors must, to find frequently revealed the kind of poet who not merely sees nothing superior to himself, but nothing except himself. I am not concerned to say that this will be unfortunate or blameworthy; the moralist of the future must attend to that. But I can believe that this unyielding and inscrutable attitude may produce some fine artistic effects. I can believe that both intensity and dignity may be gained by this sacrifice of the plainer human responsibilities, although I am not prepared to say at what loss of other qualities. It is clear that such a writer will not allow the public to dictate to him the nature or form of his lyric message,

and he will have to depend for success entirely on the positive value of his verse.

The isolation of the poets of the future is likely to lead them to band themselves more closely together for mutual protection against the reasonable world. The mystery of verse is like other abstruse and recondite mysteries—it strikes the ordinary fleshly man as absurd. The claim of the poet on human sympathy, if we regard it merely from the world's standpoint, is gratuitous, vague, and silly. In an entirely sensible and well-conducted social system, what place will there be for the sorrows of Tasso and Byron, for the rage of Dante, for the misanthropy of Alfred de Vigny, for the perversity of Verlaine, for the rowdiness of Marlowe?—the higher the note of the lyre, the more ridiculous is the attitude of the lyrist, and the coarse public applauds the violence of Diogenes when he tramples on the pride of the poets with a greater pride than theirs. I cannot help thinking that this attitude of the sacred bard, maundering from the summit of his ivory tower, and hollowed out and made haggard by a kind of sublime moral neuralgia, will have to be abandoned as a relic of the dead romantic past. So far as it is preserved by the poets of the future it will be peculiar to those monasteries of song, those "little clans," of which I am now about to speak as likely more and more to prevail.

In France, where the interest in poetry has, during the last generation, been far more keen and more abundant than anywhere else in the world, we already see a tendency to the formation of such experimental houses of song. There has been hitherto no great success attending any one of these bodies, which soon break up, but the effort to form them is perhaps instructive. I took considerable interest in the Abbaye de Creteil, which was a collectivist experiment of this kind. It was founded in October 1906, and it was dissolved in consequence of internal dissensions

in January 1908. It was an attempt to create, in defiance of the public, in contemptuous disregard of established "literary opinion," a sort of prosodical chapel or school of poetry. It was to be the active centre of energy for a new generation, and there were five founders, each of whom was highly ambitious to distinguish himself in verse. At Creteil there was a printing-press in a great park, so that the members should be altogether independent of the outside world. The poets were to cultivate the garden and keep house with the sale of the produce. When not at work, there were recitations, discussions, exhibitions of sketches, for they were mixed up with the latest vagaries of the Cubists and Post-impressionists.

This particular experiment lasted only fifteen months, and I cannot conscientiously say that I think it was in any way a success. No one among the abbatical founders of Creteil had, to be quite frank, any measure of talent in proportion to his daring. They were involved in vague and nebulous ideas, mixed up with what I am afraid I must call charlatans, the refuse and the wreckage of other arts. Yet I consider that it is interesting to note that the lay monks of Creteil were in a sense correct when they announced that they were performing "a heroic act," an act symbolical of the way in which poetry would in the future disdainfully protect itself against the invasion of common sense, the dreadful impact of the sensual world. I think you will do well, if you wish to pursue the subject of our conjectural discourse, to keep your eye on this tendency to a poetical collectivism. We have not noticed much evidence of it yet in England, but it is beginning to stir a good deal in France and Italy. After all, the highest poetry is a mysterious thing, like the practices of the Society of Rosicrucians, of whom it was said, "Our House of the Holy Ghost, though a hundred thousand men should have looked upon it, is yet doomed to remain untouched,

imperturbable, out of sight, and unrevealed to the whole godless world for ever." If I am sure of anything, it is that the Poets of the Future will look upon massive schemes of universal technical education, and such democratic reforms as those which are now occupying the enthusiasm and energy of Lord Haldane, as peculiarly hateful expositions of the godlessness of a godless world.

To turn to another branch of our subject, it appears to me possible that sexual love may cease to be the predominant theme in the lyrical poetry of the future. Erotic sentiment has perhaps unduly occupied the imaginative art of the past. In particular, the poets of the late nineteenth century were interested to excess in love. There was a sort of obsession of sex among them, as though life presented no other phenomenon worthy of the attention of the artist. All over Europe, with the various tincture of differing national habit and custom, this was the mark of the sophistication of the poets, sometimes delicately and craftily exhibited, but often, as in foreign examples which will easily occur to your memory, rankly, as with the tiresome persistence of a slightly stale perfume, an irritating odour of last night's opopanax or vervain. And this is the one point, almost I think the only point, in which the rather absurd and certainly very noisy and hoydenish manifestoes of the so-called Futurists, led by M. Marinetti and his crew of iconoclasts, are worthy of our serious attention. It is a plank in their platform to banish eroticism, of the good kind and of the bad, from the poetic practice of the future. I do not, to say the truth, find much help for the inquiry we have taken up to-day, in the manifestoes of these raucous young gentlemen, who, when they have succeeded in flinging the ruins of the architecture of Venice into its small stinking canals, will find themselves hard put to it to build anything beautiful in the place of them. But in their reaction against

"the eternal feminine," they may, I think, very possibly be followed by the serious poets of the future.

Those who have watched rather closely the recent developments of poetry in England have been struck with the fact that it tends more and more in the direction of the dramatic, not necessarily in the form of what is known as pure drama, particularly adapted for representation to listening audiences behind the footlights, but in the increased study of life in its exhibitions of energy. This may seem to be inconsistent with the tendency, of which I spoke just now, to withdraw from the world itself, either into an egotistical isolation or into some cloistered association of more or less independent figures united only in a rebellious and contemptuous disdain of public opinion. But the inconsistency may very well be one solely in appearance. It may well happen that the avoidance of all companionship with the stereotyped social surfaces of life, the ignorance—really, the happy and hieratic ignorance—of what "people," in the fussy sense, are supposed to be saying and doing, may actually help the poet to come more fruitfully and penetratingly to what lies under the surface, to what is essential and permanent and notable in the solid earth of human character. Hence, I think it not improbable that the poetry of the future may become more and more dramatic, although perhaps by a series of acts of definite creation, rather than as the result of observation, which will be left to the ever-increasing adroitness of the brilliant masters of our prose.

As a result of this obsession in creative drama, I suppose that we may expect to find in the poetry of the future a more steady hope for mankind than has up to the present time been exhibited. The result of an excessive observation of the startling facts of life, a work appropriate to the violent energy of realistic prose, has been a general exaggeration of the darker tints, an insistence on that prominence of what was called the "sub-fusc" colours which

art-critics of a century ago judged essential to sublimity in all art. In Continental literature, and particularly in the very latest Russian drama, this determination to see blackness and blackness only, to depict the ordinary scene of existence as a Valley of the Shadow of Despair, has been painfully frequent. In England we had a poet of considerable power, whose tragic figure crossed me in my youth, in whose work there is not a single gleam of hope or dignity for man;—I mean the unfortunate James Thompson, author of *The City of Dreadful Night*. I cannot but believe that the poetry of the future, being more deeply instructed, will insist less emphatically upon human failure and less savagely upon the revolt of man. I anticipate in the general tone of it an earnestness, a fullness of tribute to the noble passion of life, an utterance simple and direct. I believe that it will take as its theme the magnificence of the spectacle of Man's successful fight with Nature, not the grotesque and squalid picturesqueness of his occasional defeat.

It has been admirably said, in a charming essay, that "History may be abstract, science may be frankly inhuman, even art may be purely formal; but poetry must be full of human life." This consideration, I think, may make us feel perfectly secure as to the ultimate maintenance of poetic expression. For humanity will always be with us, whatever changes may be introduced into our social system, whatever revolutions may occur in religion, in legality, in public order, or in the stratification of composite life. I confess the only atmosphere in which it is impossible for me to conceive of poetry as able to breathe would be one of complete and humdrum uniformity of existence, such as was dreamed of at one time, but I think is no longer so rigidly insisted on, by extreme socialistic reformers. As long as there is such variety of individual action possible as will give free scope to the

energies and passions, the hopes and fears, of mankind so long I think the element of plastic imagination will b found to insist on expression in the mode of formal art It is quite possible that, as a result of extended knowledg and of the democratic instinct, a certain precipitant hard ness of design, such as was presented in the nineteent century by Tennyson in the blank verse lyrics in *Th Princess*, by Browning in the more brilliant parts of *On Word More*, by Swinburne in his fulminating *Sapphics* may be as little repeated as the analogous hardness o Dryden in *MacFlecknoe* or the lapidary splendour of Gra in his *Odes*. I should rather look, at least in the im mediate future, for a revival of the liquid ease of Chauce or the soft redundancies of *The Faerie Queene*. The remark able experiments of the Symbolists of twenty years ag and their effect upon the whole body of French verse, lead me to expect a continuous movement in that direction.

It is difficult indeed to speak of the probable future o poetry without introducing the word Symbolism, ove which there has raged so much windy warfare in th immediate past. I cannot help believing that the immens importance of this idea is one of the principal—perhaps th greatest discovery with regard to poetry which was mad in the last generation. Symbols, among the ancier Greeks, were, if I mistake not, the signs by which th initiated worshippers of Ceres or Cybele recognised the mysterious unison of heart. A symbol is an indication o an object, in opposition to a direct description of the same it arouses the idea of it in the awakened soul; rings bell, for we may almost put it so, which at once rouses th spirit and reminds it of some special event or immine service. The importance of making this the foremo feature of poetry is not new, although it may be said tha we have only lately, and only partially, become aware o its value. But, really, if you will consider it, all that th

Symbolists have been saying is involved in Bacon's phrase that "poetry conforms the shows of things to the desires of the soul, instead of subjecting the soul to external things."

There could never be presented a subject less calculated to be wound up with a rhetorical flourish or to close in pompous affirmation than that which I have so temerariously brought before you this afternoon. I hope that you will not think that your time has been wasted while we have touched, lightly and erratically, like birds on boughs, upon some of the probable or possible features of the poetry of the future. Whatever you, or I, or the wisest of professors, may predict on this theme of the unborn poets, we may be certain that there will

> "hover in their restless heads
> One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,
> Which into words no virtue"

of ours can "digest." I began with the rococo image of a Pegasus, poised in the air, flashing and curvetting, petulantly refusing to alight on any expected spot. Let me return to it in closing, that I may suggest our only sage attitude to be one of always watching for his inevitable arrival, ready to put grateful lips to the waters of Hippocrene as soon as ever they bubble from the blow of his hoof.

THE AGONY OF THE VICTORIAN AGE

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For a considerable time past everybody must have noticed, especially in private conversation, a growing tendency to disparagement and even ridicule of all men and things, and aspects of things, which can be defined as "Victorian." Faded habits of mind are lightly dismissed as typical of the Victorian Age, and old favourite poets, painters, and musicians are treated with the same scorn as the glued chairs and glass bowls of wax flowers of sixty years ago. The new generation are hardly willing to distinguish what was good from what was bad in the time of their grandmothers. With increasing audacity they repudiate the Victorian Age as a *sæclum insipiens et infacetum*, and we meet everywhere with the exact opposite of Montaigne's "Je les approuve tous l'un après l'autre, quoi qu'ils disent." Our younger contemporaries are slipping into the habit of approving of nothing from the moment that they are told it is Victorian.

This may almost be described as an intellectual and moral revolution. Every such revolution means some liberation of the intellect from bondage, and shows itself first of all in a temper of irreverence; the formulas of the old faith are no longer treated with respect and presently they are even ridiculed. It is useless to close our eyes to the fact that a spirit of this kind is at work amongst us, undermining the dignity and authority of objects and opinions and men that seemed half a century ago to be

more perennial than bronze. Successive orators and writers have put the public in possession of arguments, and especially have sparkled in pleasantries, which have sapped the very foundations of the faith of 1850. The infection has attacked us all, and there is probably no one who is not surprised, if he seriously reflects, to realise that he once implicitly took his ideas of art from Ruskin and of philosophy from Herbert Spencer. These great men are no longer regarded by anybody with the old credulity; their theories and their dogmas are mined, as were those of the early eighteenth century in France by the Encyclopædists, by a select class of destructive critics, in whose wake the whole public irregularly follows. The ordinary unthinking man accepts the change with exhilaration, since in this country the majority have always enjoyed seeing noses knocked off statues. But if we are to rejoice in liberation from the bondage of the Victorian Age we ought to know what those bonds were.

The phenomena of the decadence of an age are never similar to those of its rise. This is a fact which is commonly overlooked by the opponents of a particular section of social and intellectual history. In the initial stages of a "period" we look for audacity, fire, freshness, passion. We look for men of strong character who will hew a channel along which the torrent of new ideals and subversive sentiments can rush. But this violence cannot be expected to last, and it would lead to anarchy if it did. Slowly the impetus of the stream diminishes, the river widens, and its waters reach a point where there seems to be no further movement in their expanse. No age contains in itself the elements of endless progress; it starts in fury, and little by little the force of it declines. Its decline is patent—but not until long afterwards—in a deadening of effort, in a hardening of style. Dryden leads on to Pope, Pope points down to Erasmus Darwin, after whom the world

can but reject the whole classical system. The hungry sheep of a new generation look up and are not fed, and this is the vision which seems to face us in the last adventures of the schools of yesterday.

But what is, or was, the Victorian Age? The world speaks glibly of it as though it were a province of history no less exactly defined than the career of a human being from birth to death; but in practice no one seems in a hurry to mark out its frontiers. Indeed, to do so is an intrepid act. If the attempt is to be made at all, then 1840, the year of Queen Victoria's marriage with Prince Albert, may be suggested as the starting-point, and 1890 (between the death-dates of Browning, Newman, and Tennyson) as the year in which the Victorian Age is seen sinking into the sands. Nothing could be vaguer, or more open to contention in detail, than this delineation, but at all events it gives our deliberations a frame. It excludes *Pickwick*, which is the typical picture of English life under William IV., and *Sartor Resartus*, which was the tossing of the bound giant in his sleep; but it includes the two-volume Tennyson, "chiefly lyrical," the stir of the Corn Law agitation, the Tractarian Crisis of 1841, and the *History of the French Revolution* and *Past and Present*, when the giant opened his eyes and fought with his chains. Darwin was slowly putting together the notes he had made on the *Beagle*, and Hugh Miller was disturbing convention by his explorations of the Old Red Sandstone. Most of all, the discussion of permanent and transient elements in Christianity was taking a foremost place in all strata of society, not merely in the form of the contest around *Tract 90*, but in the divergent directions of Colenso, the Simeon Evangelicals, and Maurice.

The Victorian Age began in rancour and turmoil. This is an element which we must not overlook, although it was in a measure superficial. A series of storms, rattling and

recurrent tempests of thunder and lightning, swept over public opinion, which had been so calm under George IV. and so dull under William IV. Nothing could exceed the discord of vituperation, the Hebraism of Carlyle denouncing the Vaticanism of Wiseman, "Free Kirk and other rubbish" pitted against "Comtism, ghastliest of algebraic spectralities." This theological tension marks the first twenty years and then slowly dies down, after the passion expended over *Essays and Reviews*. It was in 1840 that we find Macaulay, anxious to start a scheme of Whig reform and to cut a respectable figure as Secretary of State for War, unable to get to business because of the stumbling-block of religious controversy. Everything in heaven and earth was turned into "a theological treatise," and all that people cared about was "the nature of the sacraments, the operation of holy orders, the visibility of the Church and baptismal regeneration." The sitting member goes down to Edinburgh to talk to his constituents about Corn Laws and Sugar Duties and the Eastern Question; he is met by "a din" of such objections as "Yes, Mr. Macaulay, that is all very well for a statesman, but what becomes of the headship of our Lord Jesus Christ?"

If the Victorian Age opened in a tempest of theology, it was only natural that it should cultivate a withering disdain for those who had attempted to reform society on a non-theological basis. In sharp contradistinction to the indulgence of the Georgian period for philosophic speculation, England's interest in which not even her long continental wars had been able to quench, we find with the accession of Victoria the credit of the French thinkers almost abruptly falling. Voltaire, never very popular in England, becomes "as mischievous a monkey as any of them"; the enthusiasm for Rousseau, which had reached extravagant proportions, completely disappears, and he is

merely the slanderous sceptic, who, after soaking other people's waistcoats with his tears, sent his own babies to the Foundling Hospital. The influence of the French eighteenth-century literature on the mind of England was first combated and then baldly denied. The premier journalist of the age declared, with the satisfaction of a turkey-cock strutting round his yard, that no trace of the lowest level of what could be called popularity remained in England to the writers of France, and he felt himself "entitled to treat as an imbecile conceit the pretence" that a French school of thought survived in Great Britain. Such was the Podsnappery of the hour in its vigilance against moral and religious taint.

Notwithstanding, or perhaps we ought to say inevitably conducted by these elements of passion and disdain, the infant Victorian Age passed rapidly into the great political whirlpool of 1846, with its violent concentration of enthusiasm on the social questions which affected the welfare of the masses, with, in short, its tremendous upheaval of a practical radicalism. From that time forth its development baffles analysis. Whatever its present enemies may allege to its discredit, they cannot pretend that it was languid or monotonous. No Age hitherto lived out upon the world's surface has been so multiform or so busy; none defies the art of the historian to such a bewildering degree. Its latest critic does not exaggerate when he says that our fathers and our grandfathers have poured forth and accumulated so vast a quantity of information concerning it "that the industry of a Ranke would be submerged by it and the perspicacity of a Gibbon would quail before it." This is manifestly true, and it is evident that an encyclopædia would be required to discuss all the divisions of so tremendous a subject. If we look over too wide a horizon we lose our bearings altogether. We get a hopelessly confused notion of the course of progress; we see experi-

ments, criticisms, failures, but who is to assure us what was the tendency of evolution?

Mr. Lytton Strachey's "Eminent Victorians" has arrived at the very moment when all readers are prepared to discuss the age he deals with, and when public opinion is aware of the impatience which has been "rising in the bosom of a man like smoke" under the pressure of the insistent praise of famous men. The book has attracted a very remarkable degree of notice; it has been talked about wherever people have met together; and has received the compliment of being seriously displayed before the University of Oxford by one of the most eminent of the Victorian statesmen whom Oxford has produced. If we look into the causes of this success, enjoyed by the earliest extended book of a writer almost unknown, a book, too, which pretends to no novelty of matter or mystery of investigation, we find them partly in the preparedness of the public mind for something in the way of this exposure, but partly also in the skill of the writer. Whatever else may be said of Mr. Lytton Strachey, no one can deny that he is very adroit, or that he possesses the art of arresting attention.

It is part of this adroitness that he contrives to modify, and for a long time even to conceal the fact that his purpose is to damage and discredit the Victorian Age. He is so ceremonious in his approach, so careful to avoid all brusqueness and coarseness, that his real aim may be for awhile unobserved. He even professes to speak "dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior intentions." We may admit the want of passion and perhaps the want of partiality, but we cannot avoid seeing the ulterior intention, which is to undermine and belittle the reputation of the great figures of the Victorian Age. When the prodigious Signor Marinetti proposes to hurl the "leprous palaces" of his native city into her "fetid canals," and to

build in their place warehouses and railway stations, he does not differ in essential attitude from Mr. Lytton Strachey, delicately "laying bare the facts of some cases." The only real difference consists in the finer tact, the greater knowledge of history—in short, the superior equipment of the English iconoclast. Each of them—and all the troop of opponents who grumble and mutter between their extremes—each of them is roused by an intense desire to throw off the shackles of a dying age, in which they have taught themselves chiefly to see affectation, pomposity, a virtuosity more technical than emotional, and an exasperating monotony of effect.

Mr. Strachey has conducted his attack from the point of view of biography. He realises the hopelessness of writing a history of the Victorian Age; it can only be dealt with in detail; it must be nibbled into here and there; discredited piecemeal; subjected to the ravages of the white ant. He has seen that the lives of the great Victorians lend themselves to this insidious kind of examination, because what was worst in the pretentiousness of their age is to be found enshrined in the Standard Biographies (in two volumes, post octavo) under which most of them are buried. Mr. Strachey has some criticism of these monsters which could hardly be bettered:

"Those two fat volumes, with which it is our custom to commemorate the dead—who does not know them, with their ill-digested masses of material, their slipshod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design? They are as familiar as the cortège of the undertaker, and bear the same air of slow, funereal barbarism."

It is impossible not to agree with this pungent criticism. Every candid reader could point to a dozen Victorian

biographies which deserve Mr. Strachey's condemnation. For instance, instead of taking up any of the specimens which he has chosen for illustration, we need only refer the reader's memory to the appendix of "Impressions," by a series of elderly friends, which closes the official *Life of Tennyson*, published in 1897. He will find there an expression of the purest Victorian optimism. The great object being to foist on the public a false and superhuman picture of the deceased, a set of illustrious contemporaries —who themselves expected to be, when they died, transfigured in like manner—form a bodyguard around the corpse of the poet and emit their "tedious panegyric." In this case, more even than in any of the instances which Mr. Strachey has taken, the contrast between the real man and the funereal image is positively grotesque.

Without question this contrast is not a little responsible for the discredit into which the name of Tennyson has fallen. Lord Selborne found nothing in Tennyson "inconsistent with the finest courtesy and the gentlest heart." Dr. Jowett had preserved through forty years "an ever-increasing wonder at the depth of his thought," and emphatically stated that he "was above such feelings as a desire of praise, or fear of blame." (Tennyson, who was thirsty for ceaseless laudation, and to whom a hint of censure was like the bite of a mosquito!) Frederick Myers ejaculated, "How august, how limitless a thing was Tennyson's own spirit's upward flight!" The Duke of Argyll, again, during the space of forty years, had found him "always reverent, hating all levity or flippancy," and was struck by his possessing "the noblest humility I have ever known." Lord Macaulay, who "had stood absolutely aloof," once having been permitted to glance at the proof-sheets of *Guenevere*, was "absolutely subdued" to "unfeigned and reverent admiration." The duke was the glad emissary who was "the medium

of introduction," and he recognised in Macaulay's subjugation "a premonition" of Tennyson's complete "conquest over the living world and over the generations that are to come."

Thus the priesthood circled round their idol, waving their censers and shouting their hymns of praise, while their ample draperies effectively hid from the public eye the object which was really in the centre of their throng, namely, a gaunt, black, touzled man, rough in speech, brooding like an old gipsy over his inch of clay pipe stuffed with shag, and sucking in port wine with gusto—"so long as it is black and sweet and strong, I care not!" Their fault lay, not in their praise, which was much of it deserved, but in their deliberate attempt in the interests of what was Nice and Proper—gods of the Victorian Age—to conceal what any conventional person might think not quite becoming. There were to be no shadows in the picture, no stains or rugosities on the smooth bust of rosy wax.

On the pretext, therefore, of supplying a brief and above all a complimentary set of portraits, Mr. Strachey takes the biography of an ecclesiastic, an educational authority, a woman of action, and a man of adventure, and tells them over again in his own way. The four figures he chooses are all contemporary, and yet, so implacably does time hurry us along, all would be very old if they still survived. Three of them could hardly survive, for Cardinal Manning and Dr. Arnold would be far over a hundred, and Florence Nightingale in her ninety-ninth year; the fourth, General Gordon, would be eighty-five. The motto of Mr. Strachey is "Put not your trust in the intellectual princes of the Victorian Age," or, at least, in what their biographers have reported of them; they were not demi-gods in any sense, but eccentric and forceful figures working dimly towards aims which they only understood in measure

and which very often were not worth the energy which they expended on them. This attitude alone would be enough to distinguish Mr. Strachey from the purveyors of indiscriminate praise, and in adopting it he emphasises his deliberate break with the age of which they were the envy and the ornament. Given his 1918 frame of mind, no blame can attach to him for adopting this gesture. At moments when the tradition of a people has been violently challenged there have always ensued these abrupt acts of what to the old school seems injustice. If Mr. Lytton Strachey is reproached with lack of respect, he might reply: In the midst of a revolution, who is called on to be respectful to the fallen monarch? Extreme admiration for this or that particular leader, the principle of Victorian hero-worship, is the very heresy, he might say, which I have set out to refute.

When St. John the Divine addressed his Apocalypse to the Angels of the Seven Churches, he invented a system of criticism which is worthy of all acceptation. He dwelt first upon the merits of each individual church; not till he had exhausted them did he present the reverse of the coin. In the same spirit, critics who, in the apostle's phrase, have "something against" Mr. Lytton Strachey, will do well to begin by acknowledging what is in his favour. In the first place, he writes sensibly, rapidly, and lucidly, without false ornament of any kind. Some of his pages might, with advantage, be pinned up opposite the writing-tables of our current authors of detestable pseudo-Meredithian and decayed Paterese. His narrative style is concise and brisk. His book may undoubtedly best be compared among English classics with *Whiggism in its Relations to Literature*, although it is less discursive and does not possess the personal element of that vivacious piece of polemic. In this recurrence of Mr. Strachey to a pellucid stream of prose we see an argument against his

own theory of revolt. The procedure of the arts, the mechanical tricks of the trade, do they really improve or decline from age to age? Are they not, in fact, much more the result of individual taste than of fashion? There seems to be no radical change in the methods of style. The extravagant romanticism of rebellion against the leaders of the Victorian Age finds at length an exponent, and behold he writes as soberly as Lord Morley, or as Newman himself!

The longest of these biographies is that of Cardinal Manning, and it is the one with which Mr. Lytton Strachey has taken most pains. Briefer than the briefest of the *English Men of Letters* series of biographies, it is yet conducted with so artful an economy as to give the impression, to an uninstructed reader, that nothing essential about the career of Manning has been omitted. To produce this impression gifts of a very unusual order were required, since the writer, pressed on all sides by a plethora of information, instead of being incommoded by it, had to seem to be moving smoothly in an atmosphere of his own choosing, and to be completely unembarrassed by his material. He must have the air of saying, in Froude's famous impertinence, "This is all we know, and more than all, yet nothing to what the angels know." In the face of a whole literature of controversy and correspondence, after a storm of Purcell and Hutton, Ward and Mozley and Liddon tearing at one another's throats, Mr. Lytton Strachey steps delicately on to the stage and says, in a low voice, "Come here and I will tell you all about a funny ecclesiastic who had a Hat, and whose name was Henry Edward Manning. It will not take us long, and ever afterwards, if you hear that name mentioned, you will know everything about him which you need to remember." It is audacious, and to many people will seem shocking, but it is very cleverly done.

The study of Florence Nightingale is an even better example of Mr. Strachey's method, since she is the one of his four subjects for whom he betrays some partiality. "The Miss Nightingale of fact was not as facile fancy painted her," and it has greatly entertained Mr. Strachey to chip the Victorian varnish off and reveal the iron will beneath. His first chapter puts it in one of his effective endings:—

"Her mother was still not quite resigned; surely Florence might at least spend the summer in the country. At this, indeed, among her intimates, Mrs. Nightingale almost wept. 'We are ducks,' she said with tears in her eyes, 'who have hatched a wild swan.' But the poor lady was wrong; it was not a swan that they had hatched, it was an eagle."

It is therefore as an eagle, black, rapacious, with hooked bill and crooked talons, that he paints Miss Nightingale; and the Swan of Scutari, the delicate Lady with the Lamp, fades into a fable. Mr. Strachey glorifies the demon that possessed this pitiless, rushing spirit of philanthropy. He gloats over its ravages, its irresistible violence of purpose. It is an evident pleasure to him to be able to detach so wild a figure from the tameness of the circumambient scene, and all his enmity to the period comes out in the closing pages, in which he describes how the fierce philanthropist lived so long that the Victorian Age had its revenge upon her, and reduced her, a smiling, fat old woman, to "compliance and complacency." It is a picture which will give much offence, but it is certainly extremely striking, and Mr. Strachey can hardly be accused of having done more than deepen the shadows which previous biographers had almost entirely omitted.

In this study, if the author is unusually indulgent to his

subject, he is relatively severer than usual to the surrounding figures. To some of them, notably to Arthur Hugh Clough, he seems to be intolerably unjust. On the other hand, to most of those public men who resisted the work of Florence Nightingale it is difficult to show mercy. Mr. Strachey is so contemptuous, almost so vindictive, in his attitude to Lord Panmure, that the reader is tempted to take up the cudgels in defence of an official so rudely flouted. But, on reflection, what is there that can be said in palliation of Lord Panmure? He was the son of a man of whom his own biographer has admitted that "he preserved late into the [nineteenth] century the habits and passions—scandalous and unconcealed—which had, except in his case, passed away. He was devoted to his friends so long as they remained complaisant, and violent and implacable to all who thwarted him. His uncontrollable temper alienated him from nearly all his family in his latter years. In private life he was an immovable despot."

This was the father of Fox Maule, second Baron Panmure, of whom Mr. Strachey has so much to say. Evidently he was a Regency type, as the son was a Victorian. Determined not to resemble his father, Fox Maule early became a settled and industrious M.P., and in 1846 Lord John Russell made him Secretary of War. He held the same post under Lord Palmerston from 1855 to 1858. Nothing could dislodge him from office; not even the famous despatch "Take care of Dawb" could stir him. In 1860 he became eleventh Earl of Dalhousie. He died two years later, having enjoyed every distinction, even that of President of the Royal Military Asylum. He was "unco guid," as pious as his father had been profane, but he had no social or political or intellectual merit of any kind which can at this distance of time be discerned. Florence Nightingale called him the Bison, and his life's energy seems to have been expended in trying, often with success, to

frustrate every single practical reform which she suggested. To the objection that Mr. Strachey has depicted the heroine as "an ill-tempered, importunate spinster, who drove a statesman to his death," he might conceivably reply that if history, grown calm with the passage of years, does so reveal her, it is rather absurd to go on idealising her. Why not study the real Eagle in place of the fabulous Swan? It is difficult to condemn Mr. Strachey along this line of argument.

The early Victorians liked what was definable and tangible; they were "ponderous mechanists of style." Even in their suggestions of change they preserved an impenetrable decorum of demeanour, a studied progress, a deep consciousness of the guiding restraint of tradition upon character. Their preoccupation with moral ideas tinged the whole of their surroundings, their literature, their art, their outlook upon life. That the works of Mr. Charles Dickens, so excruciatingly funny, should have been produced and appreciated in the midst of this intense epoch of exhortation seems a paradox, till we recollect how careful Dickens is, when his laughter is loudest, never to tamper with "the deep sense of moral evil." This apprehension of the rising immorality of the world, against which the only rampart was the education of "a thorough English gentleman, Christian; manly and enlightened," was dominant in no spirit more than in that of Dr. Thomas Arnold, of whom Mr. Strachey gives a somewhat deterrent portrait. It is deterrent, because we have passed, in three-quarters of a century, completely out of the atmosphere in which Dr. Arnold moved and breathed. We are not sure that Mr. Strachey acted very wisely in selecting Dr. Arnold for one of his four subjects, since the great schoolmaster was hardly a Victorian at all. When he entered the Church George III. was on the throne; his accomplishment at Rugby was started under George IV.

he died when the Victorian Age was just beginning. He was a forerunner, but hardly a contemporary.

Although in his attitude to the great Rugby schoolmaster Mr. Strachey shows more approbation than usual, this portrait has not given universal satisfaction. It has rather surprisingly called forth an indignant protest from Dr. Arnold's granddaughter. Yet such is the perversity of the human mind that the mode in which Mrs. Humphry Ward "perstringes" the biographer brings us round to that biographer's side. For Mrs. Ward has positively the indiscretion, astounding in a writer of her learning and experience, to demand the exclusion of irony from the legitimate weapons of the literary combatant. This is to stoop to sharing one of the meanest prejudices of the English commonplace mind, which has always resented the use of that delicate and pointed weapon. Moreover, Mrs. Ward does not merely adopt the plebeian attitude, but she delivers herself bound hand and foot to the enemy by declaring the use of irony to be "unintelligent." In support of this amazing statement she quotes some wandering phrase of Sainte-Beuve. By the light of recent revelations, whether Sainte-Beuve was ironical or not, he was certainly perfidious. But, to waive that matter, does Mrs. Humphry Ward consider that Swift and Lucian and Machiavelli were, as she puts it, "doomed to failure" because they used irony as a weapon? Was Heine and is Anatole France conspicuous for want of intelligence? And, after all, ought not Mrs. Ward to remember that if she had a very serious grandfather, she had a still more celebrated uncle, who wrote *Friendship's Garland?*

While no one else will seriously blame Mr. Strachey for employing irony in his investigation of character, the subject leads on to what may be regarded as a definite fault in his method. A biographer should be sympathetic; not blind, not indulgent, but *sympathetic*. He should be able to enter

into the feelings of his subjects, and be anxious to do so. It is in sympathy, in imaginative insight, that Mr. Strachey fails. His personages are like puppets observed from a great height by an amiable but entirely superior intelligence. The peculiar aim of Mr. Strachey, his desire to lower our general conception of the Victorian Age, tempts him to exaggerate this tendency, and he succumbs to the temptation. His description of Lord Acton at Rome in 1870—"he despised Lord Acton almost as much as he disliked him"—is not ironic, it is contemptuous. Arthur Hugh Clough presents no aspect to Mr. Strachey but that of a timid and blundering packer-up of parcels; one might conceive that the biographer had never contemplated the poet in any other capacity than, with sealing-wax in his hand and string between his lips, shuddering under the eye of Miss Nightingale. The occasional references to Lord Wolseley suggest an unaccountable hurrying figure of pygmy size, which Mr. Strachey can only just discern. This attitude of hovering superiority is annoying.

But it reaches a more dangerous importance when it affects spiritual matters. The author interests himself, from his great height, in the movements of his Victorian dwarfs, and notices that they are particularly active, and prone to unusual oddity of movement, when they are inspired by religious and moral passion. Their motions attract his attention, and he describes them with gusto and often with wit. His sketch of Rome before the Œcumenical Council is an admirably studied page. Miss Nightingale's ferocity when the War Office phalanx closed its ranks is depicted in the highest of spirits; it is impossible not to be riveted by the scene round Cardinal Manning's death-bed; but what did those manifestations mean? To Mr. Strachey it is evident that the fun of the whole thing is that they meant nothing at all; they were only part of the Victorian absurdity. It is obvious that religious enthusiasm, as a

personal matter, means nothing to him. He investigates the feelings of Newman or Keble as a naturalist might the contortions of an insect. The ceremonies and rites of the Church are objects of subdued hilarity to him, and in their presence, if he suppresses his laughter, it is solely to prevent his missing any detail precious to his curiosity. When the subject of Baptismal Regeneration agitates the whole pious world of England Mr. Strachey seems to say, looking down with exhilaration on the anthill beneath him, "The questions at issue are being taken very seriously by a large number of persons. How Early Victorian of them!" Mr. Strachey has yet to learn that questions of this kind *are* "taken seriously" by serious people, and that their emotion is both genuine and deep. He sees nothing but alcoholic eccentricity in the mysticism of Gordon. His cynicism sometimes carries him beyond the confines of good taste, as in the passage where he refers to the large and dirty ears of the Roman cardinals. Still worse is the query as to what became of the soul of Pope Pius IX. after his death.

These are errors in discretion. A fault in art is the want of care which the author takes in delineating his minor or subordinate figures. He gives remarkable pains, for example, to his study of General Gordon, but he is indifferent to accuracy in his sketches of the persons who came into contact, and often into collision, with Gordon. In this he resembles those French painters, such as Bastien Lepage, who focus their eye on one portion of their canvas, and work that up to a high perfection, while leaving the rest of the picture misty and vague. Even in that case the subordinate figures, if subdued in fogginess, should not be falsely drawn, but Mr. Strachey, intent upon the violent portrait of Gordon, is willing to leave his Baring and Hartington and Wolseley inexact as well as shadowy. The essay on General Gordon, indeed, is the least successful of the four monographs. Dexterous as he is, Mr. Strachey has not had the material

to work upon which now exists to elucidate his other and earlier subjects. But it is difficult to account for his apparently not having read Mr. Bernard Holland's life of the Duke of Devonshire, which throws much light, evidently unknown to Mr. Strachey, on the Gordon relief expedition. He ought to know that Sir Evelyn Baring urged the expedition, while Chamberlain was one of its opponents. Mr. Strachey does not seem to have noticed how much the issue was confused by conflicting opinions as to whether the route to be taken should be by Suakin or up the Nile.

No part of his book is more vigorous or picturesque than the chapter dealing with the proclamation of Papal Infallibility. But here again one is annoyed by the glibness with which Mr. Strachey smoothly asserts what are only his conjectures.

In his account of Manning's reception in Rome—and this is of central importance in his picture of Manning's whole career—he exaggerates the personal policy of Pio Nono, whom he represents as more independent of the staff of the Curia than was possible. Rome has never acknowledged the right of the individual, even though that individual be the Pope, to an independent authority. Mr. Odo Russell was resident secretary in Rome from 1858 to 1870, and his period of office was drawing to a close when Manning arrived; he was shortly afterwards removed to become Assistant Under Secretary of State at our Foreign Office. The author of *Eminent Victorians* is pleased to describe "poor Mr. Russell" as little better than a fly buzzing in Manning's "spider's web of delicate and clinging diplomacy." It is not in the memory of those who were behind the scenes that Odo Russell was such a cipher. Though suave in address, he was by no means deficient in decision or force of character, as was evidenced when, some months later, he explained to Mr. Gladstone his reasons for stating to Bismarck, without instructions from the government, that the

Black Sea question was one on which Great Britain might be compelled to go to war with or without allies. Lord Morley's *Life of Gladstone* (vol. ii., p. 354) is explicit on this interesting point. The information which, by special permission of the Pope, Cardinal Manning was able to give to him on all that was going on in the Council was, of course, of great value to Odo Russell, but his views on other aspects of the question were derived from quite different sources.

In this respect he had the advantage of the Cardinal, both on account of his diplomatic position and of his long and intimate knowledge both of Vatican policy and of the forces which the Curia has at its command. On the strength of those forces, and on the small amount of effective support which British opposition to the Decree of Infallibility was likely to receive from the Catholic Powers, he no doubt held strong opinions. Some years later he did not conceal his conviction that Prince Bismarck would be worsted in his conflict with Rome on the Education Laws, and the event proved his forecast to be perfectly correct. This is an example of the dangers which beset a too glib and superficial treatment of political events which were conducted in secret, and with every circumstance of mystery.

Several of the characteristics which diversify Mr. Strachey's remarkable volume are exemplified in the following quotation. It deals with the funeral of Cardinal Manning:—

"The route of the procession was lined by vast crowds of working people, whose imaginations, in some instinctive manner, had been touched. Many who had hardly seen him declared that in Cardinal Manning they had lost their best friend. Was it the magnetic vigour of the dead man's spirit that moved them? Or was it his valiant disregard of common custom and those conventional reserves and poor

punctilios, which are wont to hem about the great? Or was it something untameable in his glances and in his gestures? Or was it, perhaps, the mysterious glamour lingering about him of the antique organisation of Rome? For whatever cause, the mind of the people had been impressed; and yet, after all, the impression was more acute than lasting. The Cardinal's memory is a dim thing to-day. And he who descends into the crypt of that Cathedral which Manning never lived to see, will observe, in the quiet niche with the sepulchral monument, that the dust lies thick on the strange, the incongruous, the almost impossible object which, with its elaborations of dependent tassels, hangs down from the dim vault like some forlorn and forgotten trophy, the Hat."

Longinus tells us that "a just judgment of style is the final fruit of long experience." In the measured utterances of Mr. Asquith we recognise the speech of a man to whom all that is old and good is familiar, and in whom the art of finished expression has become a habit. No more elegantly balanced, no more delicately perceptive mind than his has appeared of recent times in our midst, and there is something in the equipoise of his own genius which points Mr. Asquith out as a judge peculiarly well fitted to sit in judgment upon rival ages. In his Romanes lecture there was but one thing to be regretted: the restricted space which it offered for the full expansion of the theme. Mr. Asquith excels in swift and rapid flights, but even for him the Victorian Age is too broad a province to be explored within one hour. He endeavoured to lighten his task by excluding theology and politics, and indeed but for such self-denial he could scarcely have moved at all in so dense an air. He was able, however, having thrown out so much formidable ballast, to rise above his subject, and gazing at the Victorian Age, as it recedes, he declared it to have been very good.

The young men who despise and attack that Age receive no support in any particular from Mr. Asquith.

He dwells on the fecundity of the literature of the Victorian Age in its middle period, and especially on the publications which adorned the decade from 1850 to 1859. He calls those years, very justly, "marvellous and almost unexampled" in their rich profusion. I may suggest that the only rival to them in our history is the period from 1590 to 1600, which saw the early plays of Shakespeare, the *Faerie Qveene*, the *Arcadia*, the *Ecclesiastical Polity*, *Tamburlaine*, *The Discovery of Guiana*, and Bacon's *Essays*. If the works catalogued by Mr. Asquith do not equal these in intensity, they excel them by the breadth of the ground they cover, extending from Browning to Darwin and from Thackeray to Ruskin. Moreover, the Oxford list might have included *Lavengro* and Newman's *Lectures*, and Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics*. The only third decade worthy to be named with those of 1590 and 1850 is that which opens in 1705, and is illuminated by the names of Pope, Shaftesbury, Swift, Arbuthnot, Defoe, Steele, Addison, and Berkeley. It is pleasant to compare these three magnificently flowering epochs, but not profitable if we attempt to weigh one against the other. They are comparable only in the splendour of their accomplishment.

It is more difficult to fit science into our scheme of the Victorian Age than to find places there for Art and Literature. Perhaps the reason of this is that the latter were national in their character, whereas scientific inquiry, throughout the nineteenth century, was carried on upon international lines, or, at least, in a spirit unprecedentedly non-provincial. The vast achievements of science, practical and theoretical, were produced for the world, not for a race. Mr. Asquith speaks with justice and eloquence of the appearance of Darwin's *Origin of Species* which he distinguishes as being "if not actually the most important, certainly the

most interesting event of the Age," and his remarks on the fortune of that book are excellent. No one can over-estimate the value of what we owe to Darwin. But perhaps a Frenchman might speak in almost the same terms of Claude Bernard, whose life and work ran parallel with Darwin's. If the *Origin of Species* made an epoch in 1859, the *Introduction à la médicine expérimentale* made another in 1865. Both these books, as channels by which the experimental labours of each investigator reached the prepared and instructed public, exercised at once, and have continued ever since to exercise, an enormous effect on thought as well as on knowledge. They transformed the methods by which man approaches scientific investigation, and while they instructed they stimulated a new ardour for instruction. In each case the value of the discovery lay in the value of the idea which led to the discovery, and, as some one has said in the case of Claude Bernard, they combined for the first time the operations of science and philosophy. The parallel between these two contemporaries extends, in a measure, to their disciples and successors, and seems to suggest that Mr. Asquith in his generous and difficult estimate may have exaggerated the purely Victorian element in the science of the age of Darwin. This only accentuates the difficulty, and he may perhaps retort that there is an extreme danger in suggesting what does and what does not form a part of so huge a system.

Justifiably Mr. Asquith takes it for granted that the performance of the central years of the Victorian Age was splendid. With those who deny merit to the writers and artists of the last half century it is difficult to reach a common ground for argument. What is to be the criterion of taste if all the multiform exhibitions of it which passed muster from 1840 to 1890 are now to be swept away with contumely? Perhaps indeed it is only among those extravagant romanticists who are trying to raise entirely new ideals,

unrelated to any existing forms of art and literature, that we find a denial of all merit to the Victorian masters. Against this caricature of criticism, this Bolshevism, it would be hopeless to contend. But there is a large and growing class of more moderate thinkers who hold, in the first place, that the merit of the leading Victorian writers has been persistently over-estimated, and that since its culmination the Victorian spirit has not ceased to decay, arriving at length at the state of timidity and repetition which encourages what is ugly, narrow, and vulgar, and demands nothing better than a swift dismissal to the dust-bin.

Every stratum of society, particularly if it is at all sophisticated, contains a body of barbarians who are usually silent from lack of occasion to express themselves, but who are always ready to seize an opportunity to suppress a movement of idealism. We accustom ourselves to the idea that certain broad principles of taste are universally accepted, and our respectable newspapers foster this benevolent delusion by talking habitually "over the heads," as we say, of the majority of their readers. They make "great music for a little clan," and nothing can be more praiseworthy than their effort, but, as a matter of fact, with or without the aid of the newspapers, the people who really care for literature or art, or for strenuous mental exercise of any kind, are relatively few. If we could procure a completely confidential statement of the number of persons to whom the names of Charles Lamb and Gainsborough have a distinct meaning, and still more of those who can summon up an impression of the essays of the one and of the pictures of the other, we should in all probability be painfully startled. Yet since these names enjoy what we call a universal celebrity, what must be the popular relation to figures much less prominent?

The result of this tyranny of fame, for so it must appear to all those who are inconvenienced by the expression of it,

is to rouse a sullen tendency to attack the figures of art and literature whenever there arrives a chance of doing that successfully. Popular audiences can always be depended upon to cheer the statement of "a plain man" that he is not "clever" enough to understand Browning or Meredith. An assurance that life is too short to be troubled with Henry James wakes the lower middle class to ecstasy. An opportunity for such protests is provided by our English lack of critical tradition, by our accepted habit of saying, "I do hate" or "I must say I rather like" this or that without reference to any species of authority. This seems to have grown with dangerous rapidity of late years. It was not tolerated among the Victorians, who carried admiration to the highest pitch. They marshalled it, they defined it, they turned it from a virtue into a religion, and called it Hero Worship. Even their abuse was a kind of admiration turned inside out, as in Swinburne's diatribes against Carlyle, who himself fought against the theory of Darwin, not philosophically, but as though it were a personal insult to himself. Such violence of taste is now gone out of fashion; every scribbler and dauber likes to believe himself on a level with the best, and the positive criterion of value which sincere admiration gave is lost to us. Hence the success of Mr. Lytton Strachey.

But the decline of ardour does not explain the whole position, which we have to face with firmness. Epochs come to an end, and before they have their place finally awarded to them in history they are bound to endure much vicissitude of fortune. No amount of sarcasm or of indignant protest will avail to conceal the fact that we stand to-day at the porch, that much more probably we have already penetrated far into the vestibule, of a new age. What its character will be, or what its principal products, it is absolutely impossible for us as yet to conjecture. Meanwhile the Victorian Age recedes, and it loses size and lustre as we get

further and further away from it. When what was called "Symbolism" began to act in urgent and direct reaction to the aims of those still in authority, the old order received its notice to quit, but that was at least five and twenty years ago, and the change is not complete. Ages so multiform and redundant and full of blood as the Victorian take a long time to die; they have their surprising recoveries and their uncovenanted convalescences. But even they give up the ghost at length, and are buried hastily with scant reverence. The time has doubtless come when aged mourners must prepare themselves to attend the obsequies of the Victorian Age with as much decency as they can muster.

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